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Among this week's contributors

ART

Perceiving and portraying

Rudolf Arnheim

E. H. GOMBRICH
The Image and the Eye: Further studies in the psychology of pictorial representation
320pp, Oxford: Phaidon, £18.
0 7148 2245 0

When art historians and critics deal with art objects as visual images they rely inescapably on psychology. Heinrich Wölfflin made use of the principle of empathy in his dissertation on architecture. Roger Fry lectured psychoanalysts on how to interpret art. Erwin Panofsky speculated on the perceptual aspects of retinal projection in his study of perspective. The psychology used for such purposes was often home-made, based on common-sense beliefs that happened to be in the air; and to some extent this could not be avoided because psychology had not developed the tools needed for such application.

A very different situation prevails in the body of work that E. H. Gombrich has given us during the past two decades or so. His book *Art and Illusion* had greatly increased his interest in visual perception, and he went out of his way to look for problems, solutions and laboratory findings in the publications of experimental psychologists. His impressive knowledge of the professional literature in that field has made him an expert with whom specialists in visual perception talk shop. He gives them the shock of recognition, even though his voice remains that of the art historian.

The present volume is the sixth collection of Gombrich's papers. So ample is the output and so pervasive is the approach that by now there is hardly a fact or theory for which he cannot refer back to an earlier piece of his writing. These many references act like lines holding together an edifice of great consistency, and although the building can be entered by many doors, one will receive a good sense of the whole at any access. This latest collection, like *Art and Illusion*, concerns 'the psychology of pictorial representation'. Coming from an art historian, this amounts to an extension of the study of works of art to the broader field of picture-making in general - an extension that Gombrich expects not so much to show that the particular quality we call art can be found also in the more secular varieties of pictures but rather to point out that

nothing essential distinguishes works of art from pictorial representation for other purposes. Even this more limited version of his 'ecumenical initiative', however, is welcome and fruitful.

The new collection of essays deals with such topics as the discovery of unexpected features in the visual world, the perception and representation of movement, communication through images and

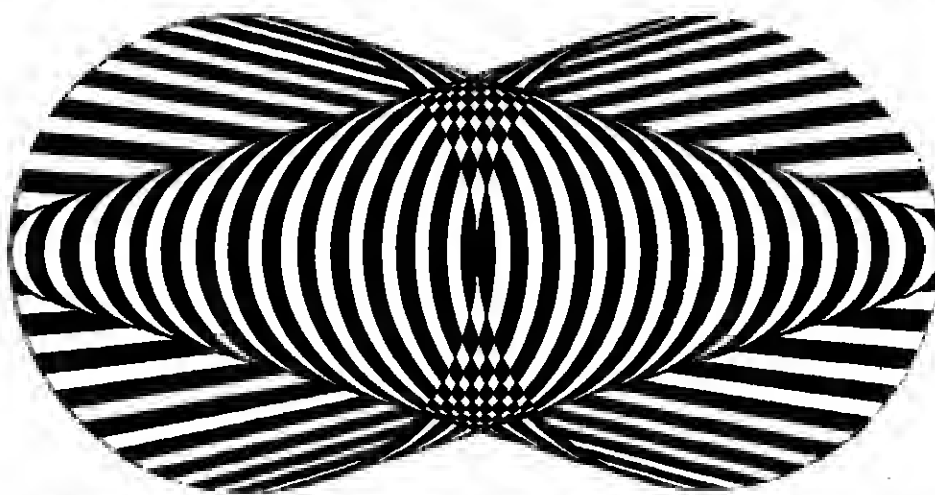
two principal versions. One of them, introduced by the art historian Alois Riegl, holds that different attitudes towards the experience of human existence make for different styles, no one of which is better than the other. More radically, there is, in the view of a school of philosophical sceptics, no objective validity to any one statement on reality since they are all purely conventional.

skills towards the attainment of a given artistic goal lie uses the increasing mastery of realistic representation and thereby suggests a one-sided parallel to the goals of science. The inversely oriented striving of Byzantine art to free itself gradually from Roman naturalism, for example, would show that the comparison of art with science cannot rely on such simple similarity of objectives. In the same vein Gombrich

of Kenneth Clark's book on the nude in art, which made me marvel at the author's proficiency in discovering anatomical inaccuracies in works of various periods - a head too small or legs too long. I checked back, and in fact the deviations were correctly diagnosed. I had never noticed them, not because I was ignorant of human proportions but because I had not looked at artistic statements on the human figure as though they were those figures themselves. From this different viewpoint, naturalistic art is not the final consummation but a risky conjunction in which art and nature are in danger of being confused.

In discussing some basic phenomena of visual perception Gombrich treats pictures as the reverberations of experiences gathered in the physical world. This is evident when he deals with the question of how movement is represented in the immobile media of art. He asserts that if the perception both of the visible world and of images were not a process in time, it could not 'arouse in us the memories and anticipations of movement'. But only percepts of real locomotion or processes in time, whereas the recourse to the past and the future phases of movement is a mere expedient to save the belief that movement can be represented in pictures only by memories of locomotion. For this same reason Gombrich asserts that 'the understanding of movement depends on the clarity of meaning', that is, on the identification of the given image with instances of actual motion in the past. It would seem to me necessary to realize that a timeless medium excludes motion in principle. Only then does one come to see that the visual dynamics inherent in the shapes and relations of images create an equivalent of movement. This explanation, however, is dismissed by Gombrich as belonging to the 'commonplaces of criticism' and as 'not quite easy to account for'.

Elsewhere also one notices a basic distrust of what an image often is regarded by itself. Throughout the book the emphasis is on the multiplicity of meanings for which pictures can stand, their flexibility of appearance, their ambiguity, and their need for explanatory context and verbal comment. These observations are certainly pertinent and well illustrated. But nowhere do we receive the corresponding and equally necessary insistence on the precision and stability



An illustration of figure-ground organization based on an ambiguous cylinder defined by intersecting circles, reproduced from Nicholas Wade's *The Art and Science of Visual Illusions* (293pp, Routledge and Kegan Paul, £19.95, 0 7100 0868 6) which will be published on November 18.

The other version of this counter-thesis derives from Gestalt psychology and holds that perception is controlled by organizational principles which regulate the structure of visual images and that any medium of representation, such as painting or sculpture, has definite properties which determine how images are shaped and what makes them most effective. Gombrich has presented impressive examples to support the more historical version of this counter-thesis, but he has barely begun seriously to consider the more perceptual one. Either way the difference of views is fundamental and the struggle between them an intellectual treat of the first order.

In defiance of naturalism Gombrich confesses to the 'parochial' view that our own heritage from the Greeks and the Renaissance is superior to other cultures in that it prepared the bases for the natural sciences and thereby promoted the perfection of 'recognizable images'. When he discusses the evolution of progressive

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that distinguishes the vast majority of visual images and on the perceptual conditions responsible for such stability.

Similarly, the depth effect of central perspective is explained in the present book not by its reliance on perceptual features of the image, such as oblique orientation, deformation of shape, and alteration of size but by its resemblance to the optical projections received by the eyes from physical space. Gombrich insists on "rigidly objective standards" of linear perspective although he certainly knows that, for example, in one-point perspective frontal surfaces are neither tilted nor curved as optical projection would require and that verticals are exempted from convergence.

What enables us to understand gestures? What makes us "see the tenseness of the throwing arm" when we look at the photograph of a hunter? That tension, we are told, is not inherent in the image. It is a mere inference from what mid-century knowledge evokes kinesthetic tensions in the viewer's body. This is a return to the old theory of empathy. Gombrich believes that bodily expression must be either symptom or convention, i.e. it can be understood only by what we conclude from its physical or mental origin or by the meaning attributed to it through our culture. The image itself is not allowed to speak—at least not in theory, for in practice there are ample indications of Gombrich's fine sensitivity to the language of vision.

In one chapter of the present book our author does indeed turn, for the explanation of a phenomenon of vision, to perceptual organization. He refers to "that principle of simplicity that pervades our perceptual processes and that has been so thoroughly explored

by the Gestalt school of psychology". In fact, the tendency towards simplest structure tells us why among all the images compatible with a given projection a particular one imposes itself upon the viewer. Past experience, says Gombrich, does not suffice to explain this. As we read on, however, we realize that the meaning of "simplicity" as here intended is not that of Gestalt psychology after all but refers to past experience once again. Simple is what is likely to be the case, "so safe a bet under normal circumstances that we can take it as a clue".

What are we to make of all this? Is this approach merely a late fruit of traditional British empiricism? Or is the historian inclined to assume that the present is nothing but the sum of outcomes transmitted from the past? If referred in the beginning to the counter-thesis, equally characteristic of Gombrich's presentation, according to which there is no "innocent eye", in *Art and Illusion* he held that the painter's starting point can never be the observation and imitation of nature, that all art remains what is called conceptual. . . . This view is hard to reconcile with all the references to direct experience on which his theories of perception are based but is in keeping with the belief that images are not what nature brings to man but what man brings to nature. In this mood Gombrich describes the manifestations of visual expression as conventions. "Indeed, what else could they be, if they are to serve communication between human beings?"

The consequences of this rhetorical question are brought home to him, however, when he finds himself face to face with the kind of desperate

relativist who is willing to state that a square is as good a likeness of the full moon as a circle since representations are nothing but arbitrary conventions. It is here that Gombrich rises to the defence of the visual image and its inherent truthfulness, to which even animals respond—an image shaped by simplification and abstraction, to be sure, and by the conventions of pictorial styles, but nature's message nevertheless. Although even the design of commercial fishing lures has changed from nineteenth-century naturalism to the abstract shapes of a Miro, Klee, and Matisse, the fish are still biting. It is from this secure basis that Gombrich's future work should be able to proceed.

From the present volume of essays human picture-making emerges as a clever but not as an admirable performance. I could not think of a more appealing source of information on the intricate mechanisms and the use of accumulated assets by which the organism copes with the obstacles to reliable sensory cognition. But we hear little about what can only be called the creative wisdom by which the visual image, in art and elsewhere, grasps essentials and renders them through the properties of a given medium of representation. The true pleasure of the book comes from Gombrich's unrivalled talent for offering his arguments with an enviable blend of Viennese wit and English concreteness. An inexhaustible store of illustrations, anecdotes, and historical facts and the fencing skill of a seasoned debater are presented with that effortless charm which Baldassare Castiglione recommended to his courtiers as *grazia*, the most indispensable virtue, he thought, of a civilized person.

"Spatially Frequent", an illustration taken from *The Art and Science of Visual Illusions* by Nicholas Wade (publication details on page 1177).

The suburban landscapes

John House

PAUL HAYES TUCKER
Monet at Argenteuil
211pp. Yale University Press. £15.
0 300 02571 7

Argenteuil, a town on the Seine downstream from Paris, was Monet's home from 1871 to 1878, through the years of the first Impressionist group exhibitions; many of his friends visited him and painted there. So much is well known: in the histories the place is treated as the backdrop for narratives of the struggles of the Impressionists group against poverty and incomprehension. Some of this has already been called into question: we now know, from his own account books, that Monet earned a reasonable living from his art throughout his time at Argenteuil, and the collected reviews of the first group exhibition in 1874 show that the critics, almost without exception, made serious attempts to understand their art.

Now it is the turn of Argenteuil to take the centre of the stage alongside Monet. Paul Hayes Tucker's study *Monet at Argenteuil* examines Monet's paintings in relation to the history and topography of the place itself. At Argenteuil, Monet was surrounded by the visual evidence of metamorphosis: an old country town being overtaken by suburbanization and industrialization. His paintings depict many of the key elements in this changing scene: the railways, the railway bridge, factory chimneys queuing the skyline, new houses and roads alongside the old, Tucker's account draws heavily on local archives, augmented by a wide range of material from contemporary periodicals, about Argenteuil, and about the more general issues raised by Paris's suburban expansion. The documentation is rich and ample, marshalled only by small verbal errors, particularly in French, and by one remarkable Latin howler.

The result is in many ways a delightful book. Monet's Argenteuil comes to life in its pages in a way it never can in the dry, industrial semi-wasteland of present-day Argenteuil. Moreover, the new perspectives it offers on Monet's paintings are always refreshing, and will, one trusts, silence for ever the claim that the subjects of Impressionist painting were unimportant, only as the raw material for formal

Tucker's central contention is that Monet's Argenteuil paintings are "profound expressions of his struggle to create a modern landscape art in a rapidly changing, industrialized, and urbanized world". The paintings themselves are our only means of substantiating this, since Monet left no comment whatsoever on his attitudes to Argenteuil, or, more generally, on the problems of painting modern landscape. What, then, should the historian do? The subject presents problems analogous to those so challengingly tackled by T. J. Clark in his writing on Courbet and Manet, and at first sight Tucker's approach may be compared with Clark's: both believe that the real significance of an artist's work can only emerge by re-immersing it in its social and physical context. But here the similarities end. Tucker has no theories of history; his analyses of the paintings themselves lead, it seems, transparently to his conclusions about the meaning of individual pictures, and thence to Monet's underlying attitudes and feelings.

These last-mentioned two stages in his argument raise theoretical and practical problems. Any attempt to attribute meanings to forms must involve assumptions both about how these meanings can be located, and about whether a work of art has an varying significance, according to when and by whom it is seen, and in what context. Moreover, even if it is argued that a work can have one central significance, it cannot be assumed, as Tucker seems to do, that this is the direct expression of the artist's state of mind or of his world view.

Tucker does not confront these issues; his account is in essence an exercise in practical criticism, using the social context of the works as his yardstick. Although it is from this pragmatic side that his arguments should be carefully examined, even so, theoretical issues are involved. In discussing individual pictures, he recognizes the crucial fact that the painted ingredients of a painting have to be seen in combination, in the ways in which they are related within the picture. In Monet's canvases, factory chimneys may closely parallel trees, trunks or church spires; nature may be set inside the frame of man's intervention; sail boats may be depicted in the foreground of a bridge; and Tucker describes them

most perceptively; the problems arise at the next stage, in the passage from description to interpretation.

For Tucker, the forms of a particular picture, juxtaposed with the documented social reality of the setting depicted, are the raw material of interpretation, but the terms in which such readings can be made are never clarified. The difficulties arise on two levels. First, the qualities found in the pictures often seem to project more of the experiential framework of the twentieth-century viewer than of the nineteenth-century painter. Terms like "tension", "anxiety", "strain", "vulnerable" and "introverted" bear no evident relation to Monet's own ways of experiencing nature, so far as we can determine them, and no attempt is made to articulate the analyses in terms which would have been within the conceptual framework of a nineteenth-century viewer. Nor are these terms claimed to belong to any more universal system of analysis. The second problem is that the external terms of reference are almost entirely restricted to the social reality of the setting of the pictures. They are never located in relation to the other factors which, just as crucially, helped to determine their form and appearance, making questions of pictorial composition, attitudes to colour and brushwork and to the question of imagery used, not in its geographical setting at Argenteuil, but in relation to pictorial traditions in landscape painting. Only passing mention is made, too, of Monet's prospective patrons and the market for which he was working. The paintings, as Tucker clearly shows, do reflect their social position, but, as acts of self-conscious picture-making within a particular tradition of social painting, they demand an analysis wider in its terms of reference.

At times Tucker glances outside his self-imposed limits and provides fascinating observations, such as his comparison between Jean on the Mechanical Horse and Velázquez's "Infante Don Baltasar Carlos on Horseback". Monet's painting clearly is a reference (perhaps ironic) to this portrait; but is Tucker right to interpret this socially, and claim that Monet and his middle-class contemporaries, with their new-found wealth and success, were using the form of the portrait of old to signify their own newly attained status? Here we shudder, in the

book, one senses an undeclared allegiance to a form of Marxist analysis which sees a painting as essentially a mirror, or an evocation, of social reality, saying even a relative autonomy to the traditions of picture-making within which Monet's work must also be seen.

Further problems arise when Tucker moves from individual pictures to locate Monet's own point of view. He seeks a core of self-expression, within the artist's state of mind, the great diversity of Monet's depictions of Argenteuil. In contrast to the "tension" and "anxiety" of "The Vineyards in the Snow", vineyards about to be swept away by the growth of the town—he finds in "The Garden at Argenteuil" a statement of "what Monet wanted for himself". Elsewhere, though, we find Monet able to celebrate the march of progress. After the "uneasiness and isolation" of a river-scene of 1874, the "exuberance" (sic) of two river-scenes of 1875 has to reflect "the world of romance and poetry that he wanted Argenteuil to be", though "by 1875 it was evident that Argenteuil was not such a place". Finally, the structure of the garden scenes with figures of 1873 suggests "domestic difficulties" and "familial estrangement".

One may disagree, subjectively, with Tucker's reading of individual paintings (such as "The Vineyards in the Snow"); but the crucial question is the more general one, whether he is justified in moving from picture to painter. Does the mood of each picture somehow reflect Monet's mood? Here again Tucker seems to be hamstrung by his limited terms of reference. Monet's solutions in individual paintings beg to be related to contemporary debates to artistic circles, especially about the relationship between sketch and finish, and about the aesthetic of modernity. Tucker is little concerned with questions of process and working method. Parts of occasional paintings are described as unfinished, but he does not recognize that several of the sketches he discusses (such as XIX and XXI) are *esquisses* (sketches) complete in their own terms but not finished enough to be considered (*tableaux*), and that the qualities which he sees as characteristics of the *esquisses* are shared by painters and writers of the time: vigorous bold execution which translates the painter's first ideas and experience.

Questions about the aesthetic of modernity are raised by Tucker's treatment of the figure paintings of

1873. He compares them with Manet and Tissot, but without recognizing that all three artists, rather than expressing a personal mood, were searching along parallel lines for compositional structures which would express the characteristics of modern life. Details of the milieu in which they painted are relevant to this, but not the "passionate observer" of Baudelaire's *Painter of Modern Life*, absorbed in the diverse appearances of the scene around him, but retaining his impartiality and his incongruity. The immense variety of Monet's Argenteuil paintings and the painter's detachment from his subject, suggested by the physical viewpoints he favoured, can far more easily be accommodated within a Baudelairean framework than in a search for personal expressiveness. The picture itself had many facets and contrasting moods; these Monet explored, but the moods of the paintings are not the moods of the painter.

At the beginning of *Monet at Argenteuil* Tucker quotes a remarkable passage from Frédéric Chévalier's review of the 1877 Impressionist exhibition:

The disturbing ensemble of contradictory qualities which distinguish the Impressionists: the crude application of paint, the down-to-earth subjects, . . . the appearance of spontaneity, . . . the conscious incoherence, the bold colours, the contempt for form, the childish naïveté, that they mix headlessly with exquisite refinements . . . all of this is not without analogy to the chaos of contradictory forces that trouble our era.

This text suggests, in the critical language of the day, how Monet's paintings at one and the same time could be expressions of modernity and the pioneers of a new type of picture-making: a comprehensive account of Monet at Argenteuil will have to pursue all the strands in Chévalier's account in a way that Tucker does not, to see how they converge to produce these paintings.

But why did Monet leave modern Argenteuil for the true countryside at Vétheuil, to embark on a course which was to lead him to the exclusive focus on colour and atmosphere? Tucker's concluding sentence is very apt: "Here [at Vétheuil] Monet could be alone in front of his motif, pursuing not the dialectic of city and nature, but the dialectic of vision and nature."

JOHN HAFENDEN
The Life of John Berryman
466pp. Routledge and Kegan Paul.
£15.
0 7100 9216 4

EILEEN SIMPSON
Poets in their Youth
280pp. Faber. £10.50.
0 517 11925 5

Even by his own exacting standards, January 29, 1963 must have seemed to John Berryman an eventful day. At 8 am a visit from Delmore Schwartz, who had come by taxi all the way from Cambridge, Massachusetts to Providence, Rhode Island and ordered the driver to wait outside. The last time he had seen Schwartz, three months previously, Berryman had rescued him from the jail where he was being held on a drunkenness charge. Now here he was pacing up and down the room, refusing food, coffee or "even a drink". Then, as he was about to leave, he was inexplicably as he'd arrived. Berryman was distressed by the visit, seeing it as further evidence that the "electric" companion of his youth had gone into an unresolvable decline. But he had scarcely time to get over it before another friend, Daniel Hughes, arrived with the news that Robert Frost had died. This time the reaction was brisk and self-interested: "Dan, it's a scary. Who's number one? Who's number one? Cal (Robert Lowell) is number one, isn't he?" This was Berryman's way of saying that if Lowell wasn't (as he hoped he wasn't), then he must be.

There could hardly be a more vivid demonstration of those warring spirits in Berryman, the fierce competitor and the loyal friend. It was his fate, when the success of *77 Dream Songs* (1964) and *His Toy, His Dream, His Rest* (1965) briefly brought him the fame he long craved, to be cast in a series of more sensational roles: drunk, womanizer, manic depressive. But his driving obsession was the knowledge that his friends and heroes, whom he dearly wanted to prosper, were also his literary rivals, whose successes threatened to put his own in the shade. In life he expressed this ambivalence through his use of the word "pal", which he managed to make sound both affectionate and intimidating, jovial and aggressive. It is a form of address which Henry, in the *Dream Songs*, also employs:

-Has you the night sweats & the dry sweats, pal?

-Pal I do.

-Did you get leave you? - What do you think pal?

-Is that thing on the front of your head what it seems to be, pal?

-Yes, pal.

In death—that is, as he watched friend after friend go to an early grave—the ambivalence was voiced through elegies which weep and wail while also joking for a place in the pantheon:

The high ones die, die. They die. You look up and who's there?
I am cross with god who has wrecked this
generation.

First he seized Ted, then Richard, Randall, and now Delmore:
In between he gorged on Sylvia Plath.
That was a first rate haul.

"Cross" sounds too arch even for so Audenesque a poet as Berryman, but, like "Hurrah" (Alas), in another *Dream Song*, is a pivot for conflicting feelings. Much as he mourned the deaths of Roethke, Blackmur, Jarrell, Schwartz, Flath and son on, he knew the honour he sought that of Greatest Living American Writer, he was a "cross" with god but—he had to be frank about this—he was not utterly devastated. On the other hand, what was the prize worth if one's friends weren't there at the party to give you their accolade? In 1959 Berryman asked Howard Nemerov: "If you ever really made it big, would you want to be the only one? Out there in front all man and oven there, amidst all the publicity, even catches a note of genuine dread: 'all by yourself'—no, perhaps being top dog wasn't worth it."

Berryman had ample opportunity to

ponder the pitfalls of ultimate success since for most of his life there seemed not the slightest prospect of his being embarrassed by them. His debut at twenty-six, in an anthology called *Five Young American Poets*, was profoundly unimpressive; only Randall Jarrell, now one of the other three, Mary Rueff, W. R. Moses and George Marion O'Donnell? and \$6.25 first year's royalties. At thirty-four, firing off advance copies of his first full-length collection, *The Dispossessed*, to Pound, Stevens and others, he sat back and waited to be famous: nothing happened. As his first wife Eileen Simpson recalls, on publication day there was "no celebratory party, no mail, no phone calls, no copies in bookstores"; and when reviews eventually came they were at best tepid, and in *Yvor Winterson's* case icy. "Most of his poems appear to deal with a single all-inclusive topic: the desperate chaos, social, religious, philosophical and psychological, of modern life, and the corresponding chaos and desperation of John Berryman." Berryman was forty-two before *Homage to Mistress Bradstreet* won him the praise of fellow-poets and critics, and fifty, with only eight more years to live, when the Pulitzer Prize-winning *77 Dream Songs* made him known to a wider public. He has been called a late starter but unlike many of that breed he was writing prolifically throughout his life; more accurately he was a fast finisher, coming up on the Schwartzes and Roethkes, and into his own, as they ran out of steam.

Once successful, Berryman was able to convince himself that it had actually been "beneficial" to him to have been kept from success for so long: it had, as it had dried up for Delmore Schwartz, and as it was to dry up for Berryman himself before the end. Even in the darkest years he kept hoping. The same self-deluding logic that persuaded him that alcoholism nourished his writing and that "hounding for friends' wives or girls is really a way of getting closer to friends" also furnished him with evidence that, against all the evidence, he would finally come good. "All I want is *time* and I will be a great poet still," he recorded in his diary for 1948. But this is what those who don't become great poets also write in their diaries, and Berryman's next sentence sounds distinctly hollow, a whistling in the dark: "I feel, frankly, that scarcely anyone is better off now." In truth, he spent some twenty years of his life feeling bitter and neglected, consoling himself with the examples of those like Yeats and Housman who flourished late after "a certain failure in youth", but half-reconciled to that pie-in-the-sky, posthumous recognition.

At times, indeed, Berryman was not sure whether he was right in aspiring to be a great poet at all: there were spells when he wanted to be a great critic, teacher, editor or Shakespearean scholar instead. Chances in all these areas came his way. The Rockefeller Foundation gave him a fellowship to produce an edition of *King Lear* as a task he worked at ferociously from 1944-46 (at night he would squeeze through a tiny window into the closed library at Princeton) and, still, dreamed of finishing at the end of his life. He was offered the editorship of the *Severn Review*, but chose to take up a one-year appointment at Princeton. He seemed always on the verge of accepting a permanent post, but somehow never did. Instead, drifting from English department to Creative Writing programme to summer school, rarely staying anywhere for more than a year, losing that job because of drunkenness and this one because of misbehaviour, breaking an ankle here and a leg there, he became embroiled in an endless series of musical chairs that threatened to leave him jobless and demoralized each fall. Chastising himself, he filled his diaries with resolutions to improve. New Year promises to himself to "fulfill duties at once", to be a better husband, "to talk less in a softer voice, and restrain impatience", to "bury my moods and feelings and opinions altogether in myself". But he must have known that, at forty, he had made as little headway in acquiring social graces as he had in

Confessing to the strain

Blake Morrison

the literary and academic world. A diary entry for 1955, in which he decides that he has wasted the last seventeen years of his life and has perhaps seventeen more (exactly right) to make amends, sums up his progress:

- 1) my early reputation, such as it was, means little & is fading.
- 2) I have no position, or influence.
- 3) No work is visible.

Possibly 2 or 3 books wd make a hell of a difference.

Miraculously, those books got written and did make a hell of a difference.

It was sensible advice, but the problem was more complex than even Van Doren realized. For Berryman was belatedly to discover that to strain and be under strain was for him the "natural" mode.

The first poem to make a virtue of this is *Homage to Mistress Bradstreet*. Within two weeks of beginning it Berryman vowed in his diary: "Evil of Stevens, disquiet me no more. I am sober, subject-ed, formal. Riot therefore! with good conscience." The poem's broken syntax, all stammered



This is why alongside the myth of Berryman the Bohemian *artiste unique* and *poète maudit* can be found the more comfortable myth of Berryman the Smilesian self-helper, whose only island for many years was his dogged pursuit of talent and who teaches all aspiring writers that if they keep going and keep trying they may make it in the end. It is the stuff that Poetry Workshops are made on, and no harm in that, but it overlooks how much of Berryman's work of the 1930s and 40s was not useful apprenticeship but merely waste: the ground may have been prepared but the mature Berryman built elsewhere. The photos for those years show an urbane, long-faced, clean-shaven man in an Ivy League jacket and bow-tie, quite unrecognizable as a precursor of the heavily-bearded sage of the late-60s. The early poetry is similarly unrecognizable and smooth-faced: a swe of the fluency and ease he admired in Auden. Berryman willed himself to produce the perfect pentameter, to contrive well-shaped stanzas, to strike cool burlesque-laden attitudes: "It was a tortuous and torturing struggle, undertaken with the same perspiring conscientiousness that students discerned in his teaching (he had to change his shirt after every lecture) and requiring him to whip up emotions that weren't there—no wonder 'self-flagellation' was among the explanations." Berryman's work like "The Ball Poem" seems the product of another writer: its assumption of a fluent, empathizing, humanist persona—"I suffer and move, my mind and my heart move / With all that moves me"—is unearned by what precedes it. In the poem and at odds with the rest of the oeuvre. When, in 1935, Harriet Monroe at *Poetry* rejected the young Berryman's work with "I think you have strained too hard for your effects," Mark Van Doren, the most influential of his teachers, wrote encouragingly: "Go on and strain. Naturalness will come later. It would be shocking for you to be natural now."

sentences, jagged assonances and misplaced verbs, belatedly to its seventeenth-century Puritan period flavour—and was appropriate for the heroine, who is overwrought and considering with repressed desire ("I enflame a fire burning without outlet, / Consuming acid its own amok. / It's mo."), sexually tempted by the poet but forced by conscience and religion to deny herself, finding release only in the lightness of childbirth. The homage is to Anne the wife, mother and would-be mistress, not to Anne the poet, whose "bald abstract didactic rime", so "proportioned and spiritless", Berryman surely associated with his own early work: wooing the "sobered" Mistress Bradstreet "is also a way of seducing his old 'teacher' self to come out, to come out, and 'luxuriate'." We know now that twisted into the poem was a good deal of personal material, including an extra-marital affair and the childlessness of Berryman's first marriage: as Eileen Simpson says of Mistress Bradstreet, "Her life was so intertwined with ours it was sometimes difficult for him to distinguish between her and himself, between her and me". But this was not how the poem was received, nor how it was meant to be. Berryman might be writing a confessional poem but he was damned if anyone was going to know. (The same rule held for *Berryman's Sonnets*, his account of the love-affair with "Lise", written in the heat of the moment in 1947: he kept the sonnets to himself for another twenty years.)

It is doubtful whether the *Dream Songs* can properly be called "confessional", either, but certainly by the time he came to write them Berryman accepted that, rather than deny the "strain" in his life, he should put it to use. Hitting upon Henry House, and all the other names that have strained too hard for your effects," Mark Van Doren, the most influential of his teachers, wrote encouragingly: "Go on and strain. Naturalness will come later. It would be shocking for you to be natural now."

jerks ("He lay in the middle of the world, and twilit"), finds a suitable voice in the jolts and twitches of the *Dream Song* style. The advance for Berryman was his discovery that emphasizing the oddity and alienation of his hero ("something bizarre about Henry . . . and like you and you") only made him more universal and representative—the Chaplinesque little man or *l'homme moyen sensuel*. Beginning, apparently, as a pet-name used by Berryman and his second wife, Henry in the *Dream Songs* turns into a pet, endearingly "bright-eyed and bushy-tailed", a whiskered cat or woofing dog with all the cartoon-like charm of a domesticated creature from Disneyland. All this, yet Henry is also crazy, alcoholic, adulterous, suicidal, desperate, paranoid, bored, a "pried open" witness to the dismaying history of his age:

I am, outside. Incredible panic rules. People are blowing and heating each other without mercy. Drinks are boiling. I see anyone feels, the worse treated he is. Fools elect kings. A harmless man at an intersection said, under his breath: 'Christ!'

About Henry's relationship to himself Berryman couldn't have been clearer: "Henry both is me and is not me, obviously." (Equally obviously, the *Dream Songs* both were and were not a coherent structure—what were the critics worrying about?) *Dream Song* 16 found another way to say the same thing:

Henry's pet was put on sundry wails where it did much resemble Henry . . .

"Pet" recalls an image used by Saul Bellow in a moving memoir printed as the introduction to *Recovery*, in which he describes his friend's art as "drawn out of his vital organs, out of his very skin". Such ideas seem inescapable with Berryman. Out of work as a young man, forced to be interviewed for jobs he didn't want, he complained to Eileen: "Every day I'm made to peel off my skin—to no purpose." Later he wrote in a *Dream Song*: "One day when I took my skin off / I felt the life / With it" and quoted Goethe's Bann: "We are using our skins for wallpaper and we cannot wait." But "pet" implying as it does trophy, display and dramatic distance, is perhaps the better way to think of his relation to the *Dream Songs*: too much has been said about him pouring out his body and soul. He himself reacted to the label "confessional" with "regret and contempt". Even *Love and Fame* in which he did so to unburden himself to an almost parodic extent:

Reflections on suicide, & on my father, I drink too much. My wife threatens seppuku. She won't nurse me. She feels inadequate.

We don't mix together. — even this book; Berryman warned, wasn't quite the "autobiography-inverse" it was masqueraded as: there were too many "lies, fictions, false chronologies, misremembrances and tarting up, too much that had been 'occluded and lost'."

All of which suggests that to write a biography of Berryman, ten years on, is a more difficult task than might be thought, more than a matter of laying out the poems and filling in the gaps. He was not, of course, an Orwell or Auden: far from forbidding a life to be written, he kept one eye fixed on posterity and would gladly excuse his affairs with "It's all part of my biography, that's all". Yet if there is one point that John Haffenden's biography, and Eileen Simpson's reminiscences agree on it is that one cannot be clear, not yet and perhaps not ever, on the key events in Berryman's life.

Take his father's death, for example. John Alyn Smith died on the morning of June 26, 1926 but what the son concludes was "a self-inflicted wound from a .32 calibre special automatic" Berryman was just eleven. The suicide, so he always claimed, left him lonely, angry, guilty, morbid, dominated and father-fixated, and for many years resistant to the idea of having children himself. As late as

1954. In a ditty, he talks of going to Minnesota "to tear him to pieces, to get square, to even the score with him". The tone here very much that of Sylvia Plath in "Daddy", a poet with whom he had much in common (dead father, strong mother, the notion of being "an imaginary Jew"). Through psychoanalysis and encounter-groups, Berryman evolved elaborate theories about the damage done to him, then belatedly overturned these when in 1970 he decided that his self-pity had perhaps been in error and that he had taken his father's death "in stride".

This confident theorizing was in strong contrast to the circumstances of the death itself, which always remained something of a mystery to Berryman, and remain so still to John Haffenden and Eileen Simpson. Why did Smith suddenly resign his post in a bank the previous September? How serious were the financial difficulties he ran into when the family moved to Florida? Did he really have an affair with "a Cuban woman", and who was she, and was it true that he gave her "every last nickel"? Did he, as family legend said, try to drown John and his brother by swimming out too far with them? When did John's mother, Martha, begin her affair with John Angus Berryman, whom she married within a few weeks of Smith's death? If a divorce between Martha and Smith was pending, was this because of John Angus, "the Cuban woman", or something else? Why in his last days did Martha allow her husband to wander up and down the beach with a gun in his hand and then, eventually taking action, bury only five of the six bullets? Was the story she told that Smith killed himself accidentally while cleaning the gun something she genuinely believed or a censored version for strangers? Berryman said that Smith "well no note", a newspaper report that there was one referring to insomnia and "terrible headaches" - which is true?

These are mysteries indeed, though there is no great mystery as to why they remain unsolved. For the only real source of information about Smith's death was Martha, for whom the circumstances seem to have been part of an ever-changing myth. Both books agree on this, though not on the reasons for it: Haffenden, who interviewed Martha when she was eighty, speaks of her poor and failing memory; Mrs Simpson thinks that Martha's differing versions, which she would supply her inquisitive son in three or four-page letters, were an attempt to steer a perilous mid-course, since she needed on the one hand to exculpate herself by presenting Smith as unstable and cowardly, and on the other hand to persuade John that his father (and therefore himself as his father's son) was a man of worth, someone to look up to, though fragile.

There is no doubt that this latter explanation is the more convincing; it fits with the picture both books give of Martha Berryman as a vain, fickle, deeply ambitious woman, much prone to invention (she liked to tell business colleagues that Berryman was her younger brother), possessive and overbearing in the treatment of her son. What neither book contemplates, though between them they give enough detail for it to be discerned, is the possibility that Martha's part in Smith's death was very large indeed and that she bombarded John with new facts and interpretations in order to divert him from a terrifyingly plausible train of events: that Martha, her marriage with Smith long since a failure, had fallen in love with John Angus and asked for a divorce; that Smith refused,

became depressed and, more in self-pity than genuine resolve, threatened to kill himself with his wife's .32 pistol; that Martha confiscated the gun and let Smith see her removing the bullets from it, though in fact one still remained; that Smith later got the gun back and in an empty flourish pulled the trigger, thus leaving Martha free to marry John Angus, funeral bak'd meats furnishing forth the marriage table. It was as well Berryman chose to work on an edition of *King Lear* not *Hamlet*, and that he was no fan of Agatha Christie. He might otherwise have penetrated even beyond this interpretation of Smith's death to what a local newspaper called "several points" in the case that interfered with the whole suicide theory - not least the facts that there were no powder burns on Smith (unavoidable in suicide cases) and that it was Martha who had found the body.

The more one looks into such aspects of Berryman's life, the more one understands why Haffenden and Mrs Simpson are able to explain so little. Sometimes, it is true, there can be no excuse for the uncertainties and contradictions; surely it is possible to establish whether, when Berryman himself jumped to his death from the Washington Avenue Bridge, he fell on to the lead-over Mississippi (Mrs Simpson), or by a pier on the embankment (Haffenden), or on frozen rocks (Joel Conarroe in a critical book of 1977). But for every case like this there are ten where the biographer is instructed to say only that he or she would like to know. Haffenden's book, in particular, floats the spectres of libel suits, against correspondences and wounded feelings, of relatives who don't want to come out of the book badly and of lovers who don't want to come out at all. This presumably explains the troubled history of the book. It began as the "official" Life, to be published by Faber, and was in an advanced state of preparation when extracts from it appeared in the *New Review* in 1976. Yet it appears only now, and from a different publisher, and without the status of an "official" Life. Haffenden says, nothing about the difficulties he has experienced; only that "to avoid offence to persons still living, I have omitted some facts". Berryman's mistresses, for instance, appear in various truncated forms - Christian names (Elsbeth), pseudonyms ("Beatrice"), first-name initials (J. and S.) or even simply "a woman who...". And when, having therewith been meticulous about months and even days, Haffenden suddenly becomes vague about the date of Berryman's divorce and second marriage ("in 1956") and the birth of his son ("in 1957"), quoting a letter that reveals Berryman's anguish and frustration at the slowness of his divorce. In coming through, we are likely to wonder, rightly or wrongly, whether Berryman married his second wife when she was expecting a child. Haffenden's book, in other words, is necessarily a compromise, forced to certain lines while allowing his audience to read between them. It is clear that some people refused to talk to him at all, and that others who did have since thought the better of it.

One of these appears to be Eileen Simpson herself, who when the *New Review* extracts were published, was being overtaken by a special debt of gratitude by Haffenden, but who is not included among the literally hundreds of people who are thanked here. A rift of some sort between researcher and researched is the likely explanation for the discrepancies between those original extracts and what is now printed in the corresponding chapters on Berryman in the 1940s: apart from one or two references to misadventures involving members of the Berryman family, nearly all the thirty or so dropped passages allude to "Mrs Simpson's relationship with her first husband, the omitted material, much of it taken from the same private diaries which Haffenden draws on throughout his book, includes an 'erotic letter' written by Berryman before their marriage, numerous references to Eileen's poor state of health and mind - she is "ill", "dizzy and nauseated", "weeping" and in "desperate grief"; an incident in which Berryman consults a clinician about "an infection of his penis"; and above all allusions to the "rows", "antipathies", "difficulties" and "distraction" in the relationship. The

version that's left is skimpier and more andy than the original. This is Haffenden's present account of the twenty-eight-year-old Berryman's short spell as an encyclopaedia salesman.

For several hours each day he tramped the streets of New York's East Side without reward; he felt hopeless and degraded, and resigned the job after a week.

When he declared to Eileen that he hated life, she argued that people who do so should not get married.

Aggrieved, after eight weeks of job-hunting in New York, exhausted and terrified, Berryman took stock of their hopeless situation. Undemoralised, he was sleeping very badly and suffering from indigestion, and the burning and itching of his scalp depressed him.

The original account has more to say about Eileen and the marriage: For several hours each day he tramped the streets of New York's East Side without reward; he felt savage, hopeless, and degraded. Eileen was reduced to a state of desperate weeping. After a week he resigned his job. On Monday 26 July, he wrote in his diary:

Home, hysteria. . . Chaos, blasphemy uncontrollable - Eileen's desperate grief.

I never had a home of my own. I never had anybody who loved me.

I never had a moment's happiness before I met you. I will never forget her voice as she said these things. God help her and give her some part of the happiness she deserves for her courage & daydreams & devotion.

A day later, Berryman declared to Eileen that he hated life; she argued that people who do so should not get married.

Aggrieved, after eight weeks of job-hunting in New York, exhausted and terrified, Berryman took stock of their hopeless situation. Eileen appeared to be close to a breakdown, getting thinner and thinner, suffering insomnia, interminable colds and coughing, "diarrhoea", "headaches", severe pain with menstruation, and fatigue from a strained back. Berryman himself was also undernourished, sleepless, very badly and suffering from indigestion. The burning and itching of his scalp depressed him.

Biographers, no less than poets, are allowed to cut, revise and reconsider, but here it seems to be a case of Haffenden not changing his mind, but having it changed for him. A further irony in this is that Eileen Simpson's own account of her eleven-year marriage, in *Poets in their Youth*, and more painful still, like many people, she is prepared to say herself what she cannot bear said by others. Her emphasis, though, is different and explains why she would object to an uncensored version above, not just as unduly personal and intrusive about herself, but as an undue piling on of the agony. Her Berryman is "the man with the irresistible grin", "wry", "implacable", "amused", "sociable and good-natured". Though frank about his suffering and self-destructive urges,

and about the difficulties of putting up with him, Mrs Simpson won't stand any ditty nonsense about Berryman choosing to martyr himself for his art: "He might say in conversation that it was necessary for a poet to suffer, and even believe it, but no one was more eager to be relieved of suffering than John." Typical of her breezy good sense is the moment early in the marriage when she sees Berryman fall to the floor during a quarrel with his mother; refusing to accept that this is the *petit mal* epilepsy doctors have diagnosed it as, she confronts him and expresses her doubts, with spectacular results: "John has no further attacks."

It is a loyal, affectionate, thoroughly endearing memoir, which valuably sets Berryman down among his friends and fellow-poets, and draws from a fund of memorable anecdotes: Randall Jarrell blackmailing at a party; the frosty Helen Blackmore, on hearing that her husband had invited "T. S. Eliot to dinner, snapping 'Tell him to bring his own chop'; Robert Lowell analysing the works of his peers while laboriously washing dishes, "a poem a plate"; Theodore Roethke grabbing Edmund Wilson's jaw and asking "What's this, blubber?"; Pound in St Elizabeth's singing parodies of Yeats's epitaph - "Under bare Ben Bulbin's bum"; Berryman himself in the small hours treating uncomprehending Parisian bakers trapped at their ovens to a reading of his latest poem. Mrs Simpson even has a new theory for the case like this there are ten where the biographer is instructed to say only that he or she would like to know. Haffenden's book, in particular, floats the spectres of libel suits, against correspondences and wounded feelings, of relatives who don't want to come out of the book badly and of lovers who don't want to come out at all. This presumably explains the troubled history of the book. It began as the "official" Life, to be published by Faber, and was in an advanced state of preparation when extracts from it appeared in the *New Review* in 1976. Yet it appears only now, and from a different publisher, and without the status of an "official" Life. Haffenden says, nothing about the difficulties he has experienced; only that "to avoid offence to persons still living, I have omitted some facts". Berryman's mistresses, for instance, appear in various truncated forms - Christian names (Elsbeth), pseudonyms ("Beatrice"), first-name initials (J. and S.) or even simply "a woman who...". And when, having therewith been meticulous about months and even days, Haffenden suddenly becomes vague about the date of Berryman's divorce and second marriage ("in 1956") and the birth of his son ("in 1957"), quoting a letter that reveals Berryman's anguish and frustration at the slowness of his divorce. In coming through, we are likely to wonder, rightly or wrongly, whether Berryman married his second wife when she was expecting a child. Haffenden's book, in other words, is necessarily a compromise, forced to certain lines while allowing his audience to read between them. It is clear that some people refused to talk to him at all, and that others who did have since thought the better of it.

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Poets in their Youth is an elegantly written book, unlike John Haffenden's well-researched and in many ways admirable biography, which is all but ruined by the awkwardness, tedious and muddle of its prose. If there is a way to say something confusingly et length that could have been said clearly and succinctly, then Haffenden will find it. The wrong pompous note is struck in the very first sentence, when he speaks of his "engagement with John Berryman, and thereafter the linguistic unhappinesses came thick and fast - from his 'grave quailms' as a biographer 'over the radical issue of war' to the wedding of Berryman's parents, who 'were regularly married on 25 July 1912'". No doubt Haffenden has had to spend many hours walled up with the John Berryman Papers in the University of Minnesota, but even so he cannot have failed to notice that it is not possible, in 1982, to describe a heterosexual braggart like Berryman as "compulsively gay". The failure of

language is especially noticeable when it comes to coping with the words "realigned", "love-interest", "generated", and there are several like this: "Although he [Berryman] strove consciously to reach a state of contentment, his responsibility, self-gratifying force which led him to succumb to disabement, and to exploit, as in sexual ventures, what otherwise was psychological discomfort."

Haffenden's major contribution is in his energetic pursuit of those friends, teaching colleagues and students of Berryman. We have, for example, an eye-witness report of Berryman's first suicide attempt when, at sixteen, he lay down in front of a approaching train and was saved by schoolfriends. The possibly true testimony is the reason for attention given to Berryman's performance as a teacher, which, rather like assessing T. S. Eliot as a banker, A. D. Noyes of former students are called upon to supply evidence, the more telling portraits and/or with passages like "Harriet Rosenberg, an attractive young woman whom marriage had broken up coincidentally with Berryman's, remembered him with happy affection for having made important areas of life and literature available to her". Faced with this of thing, one loses the sense of what were the important people in Berryman's life; we hear plenty of nonentities and half-quotations, but very little from the Lowell or Bellows who were his constant friends.

Hoffenden's book contains a photographs, a measure, no doubt, of the Berryman estate's opposition to it. Nor, irritatingly, does it tell us what that famous beard made its first appearance, a sad oversight, for such its emergence (in the mid-1940s) coincided with that of "bushy-tailed" Henry and is evidence of Berryman's identification with his hero. It is the kind of visual detail which the book impressively thorough about his affairs, bank balances, dates of addresses, is finally short of - indeed, as Hoffenden's portrait of our hero of Berryman should remain slightly fuzzy with legend. "I should be mantled without bathos", he was of Berryman's third marriage, that "the family took meals together as any regular family; Berryman particularly liked goose for Sunday dinner." Clearly, for Haffenden this bathetic, or he wouldn't have bothered to implant the notion in the first place. Certainly he never feels it necessary to honour the ghost of bathos in relation to Berryman's affairs with students, nihilism, drug-taking and Freudian self-analysis - this is all part of the received myth of the poet and as such needs no apology. Perhaps another way of saying that for it is his pioneering and fact-finding, Haffenden in the end subscribes to a rather conventional view of his subject.

Five years ago, when the book was written, this might not have mattered. Berryman's reputation was rising high and he still seemed very much to us. But already interest seems to be flagging; his works are no longer so easy to find in bookshops; the barometer of literary reputation, the university library issue ticket, suggests that students are turning to Auden instead; in classrooms, the topical and depressingly obvious case is being made against Berryman's "total absorption", "immaturity", and "unpleasant treatment of women". Competitive as he was for a posthumous reputation, Berryman would be appalled to think how quickly his star has faded, how he is already being slipped into the category of minor American ecotists, or, if not with, say, E. E. Cummings, or if not unduly humble position for the man who wrote the *Dream Songs*. But if Berryman is to be read widely and with enthusiasm in another ten years, then it will take something more than two such sympathetic advocates as John Haffenden and Eileen Simpson have provided here.

Joseph Chiari in *T. S. Eliot: A Memoir* (Scribner, £12.95) writes that "to write about a friend or about myself is to alien to me as it was to Eliot, who shared Pascal's view that to write is to uphold the memory of his 'self' in a distant and loyal friend."

From polis to philosophy

Malcolm Schofield

JEAN-PIERRE VERNANT
The Origins of Greek Thought
144pp. Methuen. £9.95.
0416 343104

The past few years have seen the publication of translations of a good number of the writings of Jean-Pierre Vernant and his Parisian associates Pierre Vidal-Naquet and Marcel Detienne, mostly devoted to structuralist analysis of Greek myths designed to illuminate the religious and intellectual framework of ancient Greek culture and society. Here, later in the day than one might have expected, is Vernant's first and shortest book, *Les origines de la pensée grecque*, 1962, well translated by an anonymous and Greekless hand ("en aut", p. 74; "basos [secular]", p. 56). The book has long constituted one of the most stimulating and thoughtful accounts of the invention of philosophy by the Greeks. It is to be hoped that the elegance and power of its argument may now become more widely known among English-speaking readership.

The [Myenaean] King's disappearance prepared the way, through the long and murky period of isolation and reconstruction we call the Dark Age of Greece, for two interdependent innovations: the institution of the city-state and the birth of rational thought." What Vernant offers is a political and social explanation of the emergence

of philosophy. And the explanation, which clearly owes much to the Durkheimian speculations of Vernant's teacher, Louis Gernet, takes a mainly diachronic form. Greece in the late Bronze Age was governed by kings from fortified palaces which formed the focus of the entire life of the communities under their sway. These kingdoms were as tightly organized as the bureaucratic states of the Near East which they so much resembled; and their spiritual universe was reflected, as was Babylon's, in cosmologies associated with royal rituals and myths of sovereignty which legitimize the power of the monarch at the same time as they account for cosmic order.

But after the collapse of the Myenaean Kingdoms there gradually grew up a novel form of community, the Greek polis, whose advent in the eighth century BC constitutes a decisive event in the history of Greek thought. Decisions and deliberations on matters of state were no longer the exclusive domain of a single person, but took place in a communal space, the *agora* or permanent central market, where all who had a full share in the life of the city debated matters of public concern on more or less equal terms - that is, all freeborn native adult males, i.e. democracies, or a purported subset of these, in oligarchies. Conflicts between the rich and the poor in the nascent polis led to religious ferment, which in turn led to radical, secularized thought - best seen in the poems of Solon about the political order and the bourgeois virtues needed to sustain it.

Thus the stage was set for the desecularization of knowledge about the natural world, and so for philosophy: "With the Milesians, the origin and ordering of the world for the first time took the form of an explicitly posed problem to which an answer must be supplied without mystery, an answer gauged to human intelligence, capable of being aired and publicly debated before the mass of citizens like any question of everyday life. They thus posited a function of understanding free of any concern with ritual." The secularization and rationalization of social life were therefore reflected in the very existence of philosophy; and its content, too, for as Gregory Vlastakis has shown, the Milesians "made use of ideas elaborated by moral and political thought, projecting onto the world of nature that conception of order and law whose success in the city had made the human world a cosmos".

Since 1962 Vernant's theory has achieved a considerable measure of acceptance among scholars writing in English, and a version of it has recently been accorded a long and sophisticated defence by Geoffrey Lloyd in his *Magic, Reason and Experience*, 1979. Its attractions may now be further enhanced by fashion or *kairos*, for the rise of the polis is currently a subject of increasing interest among historians and archaeologists. I shall ask one or two elementary questions about the explanatory properties of Vernant's original statement of the theory, which he presents for the most part in the more attractive form of a history,

without much explicit discussion of methodological issues.

Dues Vernant mean to diagnose the cause, or the main cause, of the beginning of philosophy, or rather one of its necessary conditions, or simply a factor propitious to its occurring? English advocates of the theory like Lloyd and Edward Hussey (in *The Presocratics*, 1972) seem to settle for the third and weakest alternative, which is of course the least difficult in principle to defend. They make the development of the polis the most important in a whole complex of such factors. But Vernant conspicuously avoids this pluralistic approach. He appears to be committed to a strong causal thesis, and for much of the book gives the impression of believing that social explanation is both necessary and sufficient for understanding the phenomenon he is concerned with. Whatever the merits of this position, it has resulted here in an account of the origins of Greek thought which will be too neat and schematic for many tastes.

Does Vernant explain why philosophy should have begun in (of all Greek cities) Miletus a little after 600 BC and continued to flourish there and virtually there alone - so far as we can tell - for some decades? Not directly, although he says a little about the decisiveness of contacts with the East in the "unleashing" of Greek science in his career. Presumably he believes on the question about Miletus is too particular to be of vital help in explaining the phenomenon he is concerned with. He certainly needs to begin tackling Vernant's larger question, then his general social explanation is no longer of the adequate form, since it posits to the condition of the polis in general, not of one or more particular poleis. I do not see how - given the paucity of the evidence - Vernant can know enough to be confident that it was not some

very special concatenation of circumstances in Miletus (eg, its prosperity, its mercantile self-confidence, its proximity to the East, the flourishing literary and material culture of Ionia) which prepared the way for philosophy there, and whose absence in other cities despite their thoroughly political institutions, made it less likely to originate elsewhere.

Vernant says a bit more, within his general diachronic account, about the significance of the introduction into Greece of an alphabetic script from the eighth century on, as a perfect instrument of the public, secular values of the polis. He discusses in this context the book of Anaximander, which was very likely the first prose book ever written by a Greek. That achievement illustrates the dangers of supposing that the origin of Greek philosophy can be more than very inadequately explained by any theory. However vigorous public debate in sixth-century Miletus may have been, and however well entrenched the use of writing for legal codes and official records, or for poetry, it needed an inspired individual to take the step (still obscure in its intentions) of writing a philosophical treatise in prose: thus inventing genre and medium and mode of transmission at a single blow, and simultaneously creating the possibility of a tradition of philosophizing. It is as startling a leap forward as that made by the monumental poet of the *Iliad* when he conceived the idea of a massive epic, built from traditional oral materials, which yet could never be sung in a single night or at a single festival. In speculating on the origins of Greek thought we need the concept of the genius, or more generally of the freedom and creativity of the individual, as well as the Durkheimian strategies which are a deadly and persuasively employed in Vernant's masterpiece of popular exposition, rich in information and insight.

From success to failure

Mary Lefkowitz

KEVIN CROTTY

Song and Action: The Victory Odes of Pindar
173pp. Johns Hopkins University Press. £11.25.
08018 2746 8

Ever the ancient Greeks had difficulty with Pindar's poetry. Not long after his death, stories were told about his poems that explained obscure passages as allusions to quarrels with his patrons and his rivalries with other poets. Eventually scholars created *ad hoc* *memories* to supply readers with information about the less familiar names and places and to offer interpretations, often fanciful, of the relevance and meaning of unfamiliar allusions and phrases. None the less, these ancient critics could assume that their readers knew everyday Greek and had some basic understanding of ancient Greek religion, along with a general knowledge of the main facts of chronology and geography. But interpreters of Pindar today, especially in America, cannot assume that non-specialist readers will know anything about Pindar or his world, except that his poetry has been thought difficult, even when read in English translation, and that classical scholars at least consider his poetry important enough to try to make students read it, in spite of all the obstacles imposed by difference of language and culture.

Making Pindar accessible to modern audiences has become such a daunting task that the traditional forms of commentaries and translation appear to have been abandoned. Instead, new books assume that their readers will not have the time or ability to read articles in several European languages, or to pore over schoolroom maps of Greek colonies in Italy, or to track down in mythological handbooks the fabled achievements of Pindar's ancestors - the Aegidae. Frank Nisetich's new translation (Baltimore, 1980) provides historical background, glossaries, outlines of myths, details about the ancient games and epics maps. For readers who know some Greek, Douglas Gerber's helpful commentary on the First Olympian Ode (Toronto, 1982) requires the space of an entire book for a single Pindaric poem. The *Song and Action* Kevin Crotty tries to put Pindar's poetry in cultural perspective by describing the

general function of the odes and some of their principal themes. His method is to summarize certain odes, and to discuss sections from others along with passages treating similar themes from other Greek literature, thus providing the reader with the background he cannot be counted on to know or to look up.

For example, *Olympian 1*, the ode to which Gerber devotes a whole book, is discussed briefly by Crotty in several different contexts. He uses the central myth of the poem to describe the relation between action and retribution, and later to illustrate how the gods' favour to men can be expressed in terms of erotic passion. In each case Crotty gives considerably more space to explanations of the general patterns of thought than to their particular expressions in *Olympian 1*. Action and retribution, like culture and nature, praise and blame, both complement and supersede one another, not only in Pindar's victory odes, but in the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad*, and finally in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*. The theme of man's original close ties with the gods and their dissolution goes back to the myth of the Golden Age Hesiod, and survives in Aristotle's analysis of the political purposes of friendship.

Crotty's approach has the advantage of making Pindar appear to be less anomalous than he might seem if one looked directly at the sudden shifts of theme and metaphor in the text of his poems. Surely part of the appeal of this method is that it keeps the reader at a comfortable distance from the text, and in the realm of general anthropology and ethics, where he can readily gain insight into the values of the Greek world. But there are also some formidable disadvantages. Insidiously, the reader is encouraged to think in terms of polarities, such as culture and nature, which would not have been apparent to the Greeks themselves. The poet's thought, when expressed in terms of polar oppositions, seems both less complex and less original than it does when one reads through an ode from beginning to end. Little consideration has been given to essential distinctions in genre, chronology, or setting in the wide variety of ancient literature that Crotty cites.

If Crotty had been dealing with the plot of a particular myth or a long narrative poem like the *Iliad*, he could have expected even inexperienced readers to cope with his supplementary digressions and excursions. But

Pindar's narratives are only occasionally straightforward, and a coarser proportion of any poem is concerned with the present achievement of patron and poet. Also, what makes the poems exciting is not so much what Pindar says, which can sound conventional or even banal in summary, as how he says it. Crotty's discussions of several complete odes and his treatment of longer passages, although clear and sensible, never invite the reader to engage himself with the vivid details that make Pindar's poetry so memorable; where Pindar speaks - ironically to us - of Calm (*Hesychia*): "barsh, you attack your enemies' power and put their insolence in the blye" (*Pythian* 8.10-12). Crotty summarizes not inaccurately, but blandly, that "as daughter of Justice, *Hesychia*'s actions are of a retributive kind: she rewards gentleness and punishes the insolent".

Crotty should be commended for having tried to go beyond the narrow concerns of much recent scholarship, and for concentrating on the larger ethical issues raised by the odes; he justly reminds us that Pindar's audiences learned from his poetry how to confront extraordinary success and the ultimate failure of human enterprise. But as it stands *Song and Action* is more about Pindar's world than Pindar's poetry, and Crotty's readers - if they read only his book - will never know why the ancients considered Pindar the greatest of the lyric poets.

Just published in the Cambridge Greek and Latin Classics series, of which the General Editors are E. J. Kenney and Mrs P. E. Easterling, are new editions of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* and the *Trachiniae* (thus bringing up to four the number of Sophocles' tragedies that are available in the series). The *Oedipus Rex* - the "masterpiece that in the eyes of posterity has overshadowed every other achievement in the field of ancient drama" - has been edited by W. D. Dawe (260pp. Cambridge University Press, £19.50 and paperback £7.50, 0 521 24543 5 and 0 521 28777 4) and P. E. Easterling has herself edited the *Trachiniae* (254pp. Cambridge University Press, £19.50 and paperback £7.50, 0 521 20087 3 and 0 521 28776 6). Each has a text with critical apparatus, a commentary dealing principally with the play as literature, an introduction designed for readers even without knowledge of Greek, an appendix on metre and a section on the translation of the text.

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A pleasant universal sorrow
Angst made mellow
By the Illeg, Camembert
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In the destructive element
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John Mole

The falling-out in Paradise

Clive Sinclair

Bernard Malamud

God's Grace
223pp. Chatto and Windus. £6.95.
0 7011 2647 7

Had I read *God's Grace* before Rosh Hashana I would have taken the opportunity to send Bernard Malamud one of the New Year cards I obtained from JONAH (Jews Organized for a Nuclear Arms Halt), since the novel is a postscript to the card's awful warning: "God gave Noah the Rainbow Sign! No more water - The fire next time!" The book's opening is the world's ending; taking no heed the *Diaks and Drushkies* annihilate the earth and the inhabitants therein in a thermonuclear war. Only Calvin Cohn survives, being heretofore the sea at the time, plying his trade in a battered crennography vessel. On returning in the surface he banisters with God, like the patriarchs, and is assured that his survival is a mistake that will soon be rectified. For some time Cohn floats in the ether, the Rebekah Q (no other also, you'll recall, to Jacob and Esau, fraternal outcasts who haunt Malamud's fiction, not least the book in question), until a tempest spews the boat up on a tropical isle, Paradise itself. By this time Cohn has encountered, covering in a cupboard, an unusually intelligent chimp, educated in sign language and more by the sinister-sounding Dr. Bunder. The pair disembark, Cohn having renamed his charge Buz (after Nahor, brother of Abraham) in place of Gottlieb (too Testonic). On the island Cohn discovers that Buz (who appropriately named) has been bitten with a voice box and has, moreover, the gift of tongues. This bilingualism comes in handy when they meet other primates, including an Alpha Ape whom Buz, aping Cohn, prophetically calls Esau.

A new departure for Malamud, claims the blurb. To be sure, the relationship between man and ape requires him to make an imaginative (not to mention brachial) leap; but in essence he has been there before. At the end of *The Tenants* Harry Lesser and Willis Spearmin, two writers, the

one a descendant of Abraham, the other of Ishmael, bring civil war to their island equivalent, an otherwise deserted tenebrous, the latter screaming "Bloodsuckin' Jew Niggerhater", the former, "Anti-Semitic Ape". Lesser's words become literally true when Cohn, in his turn, is set upon by Esau who threatens, "I will break every Jewbone in your head." The bone of contention being the same in both cases: Lesser and Cohn heaving stolen the other's girl (viz Irene and Mary Madelyn) with Jacob's cunning. Furthermore, as a prelude to the final bloody confrontation, Spearmin destroys Lesser's precious manuscript, a postscript to the card's awful warning: "God gave Noah the Rainbow Sign! No more water - The fire next time!" The book's opening is the world's ending; taking no heed the *Diaks and Drushkies* annihilate the earth and the inhabitants therein in a thermonuclear war. Only Calvin Cohn survives, being heretofore the sea at the time, plying his trade in a battered crennography vessel. On returning in the surface he banisters with God, like the patriarchs, and is assured that his survival is a mistake that will soon be rectified. For some time Cohn floats in the ether, the Rebekah Q (no other also, you'll recall, to Jacob and Esau, fraternal outcasts who haunt Malamud's fiction, not least the book in question), until a tempest spews the boat up on a tropical isle, Paradise itself. By this time Cohn has encountered, covering in a cupboard, an unusually intelligent chimp, educated in sign language and more by the sinister-sounding Dr. Bunder. The pair disembark, Cohn having renamed his charge Buz (after Nahor, brother of Abraham) in place of Gottlieb (too Testonic). On the island Cohn discovers that Buz (who appropriately named) has been bitten with a voice box and has, moreover, the gift of tongues. This bilingualism comes in handy when they meet other primates, including an Alpha Ape whom Buz, aping Cohn, prophetically calls Esau.

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wife number one couldn't have been much fun) and genuinely horrific. Besides being his betrothed, Mary Madelyn was also Cohn's most conspicuous success, overcoming her concupiscence in favour of love à la Romeo and Juliet - whose and Cohn foolishly withheld from her.

Sexual jealousy turned Buz, Cohn's mini-matriarch, into the self-appointed Adam, into a traitor (his last words being, "I am not Buz, my name is Gottlieb"), and the others into outright antisemites, child murderers and cannibals.

Subsequent to the playful but unbearable slaughter of Rebekah, Mary Madelyn reverted to type, offering herself to all concerned. Esau first, Sulphurous Esau, the local Satan, only briefly struggled against her, darker nature before descending to the depths of which he was capable: the assassination and consumption of baboon cubs. This sadistic gourmandising in made shocking beyond the deed because the cadavers had names, so were as good as people. Such is Malamud's talent for the particular that these deaths are more disturbing than the extinction of every other living creature with which the book started. Malamud has spent his considerable energy on transmitting

ethology into fiction, the accuracy of which has been stabilised by the coincidental publication of Frans de Waal's *Chimpanzee Politics* (subtitled "Power and Sex among Apes"), in which many of Esau's devious plot and hunting techniques may be read.

By turning living chimps into fiction Malamud has, paradoxically, made them more alive. The weak link in this evolutionary chain is actually homo sapiens, Calvin Cohn himself, he is one of Malamud's second stringers like Arthur Fiedelman. Cohn's rabbinic father and anonymous wife seem part of a contrived past, making one wonder if these posthumous characters ever had a life before death.

In short, the novel lacks the mad balance that assured the destruction of the world; the latter part, in which Cohn's Eden comes a cropper, outwits the former, in which the combatants are given their say. Disguises. Thus the not improbable is made to seem fantastic, while the highly unlikely appears realistic. If only Malamud had exerted the same imaginative powers upon the microcosm as he does upon his macrocosm. *God's Grace* would have been *Malamud's Grace* too. As it is Cohn's ménage adds an unforgettable fragment to the collected works. Malamud, I suspect, is too humane to play God.

Adam Mars-Jones

ANNE TYLER
Dinner at the Homestead Restaurant
303pp. Chatto and Windus. £7.50.
0 7011 2648 5

Anne Tyler's *Tullis*, the protagonists of her splendid new novel, are an uncharacteristic American family. In that the forces that keep them together are every bit as stubborn as the ones which drive them apart. The pivotal character is probably Ezra, who becomes a restaurateur instead of the expected teacher, but his establishment offers the apothecosis of home cooking, rather than its opposite. At the Homestead Restaurant you may not get what you order, if for example Ezra thinks the omelette would do that of yours more good.

Throughout the book Ezra attempts to serve his family (his older brother Cody, his younger sister Jonny, his mother Pearl) a proper family meal at the Homestead Restaurant, but someone is always walking out on him; the book ends, perhaps wisely, before the final meal of reunion is either ruined or accomplished.

The book starts with Pearl Tull on the point of death, then flashes back to her early life; its course thereafter, though never predictable, is more or less chronological. Pearl Tull married late, was left by her husband, and brought up her children without help; it would have taken a brave neighbour to offer her any. The children were used to their Daddy being away for long periods (he was an insurance salesman), and she didn't even tell them that he wouldn't be back. When years later, they simply ignored her and went on talking amongst themselves.

Pearl, in other words, is not the only strong character. In the family, True, her eldest son Cody grew up as a cold and conventional figure, ambitious and manipulative, but that was just his way of coping with his appallingly warm and expressive brother.

Nothing was too much effort, for Cody, if he could get Ezra into trouble. He sabotaged Ezra's bed, late at night, and scattered gilly magazines around the room, so that when the bed collapsed and Pearl came running, Ezra was surrounded by the evidence of vice. Coming across Ezra asleep, Cody framed him with cigarette packs and half-empty bottles, and took a photograph. Ezra's car, in the crook of his arm, yawned. What a picture that'd make. Cody thought, dead-end Ezra and his no-account on, both with gaping mouths. He would represent not a retreat from reality but a twenty year hibernation, but more an old manuscript unjustly ripped from the bottom drawer where it should have remained.

At moments like these, the opposition between Cody (calculated) and Ezra (spontaneous), between a rock and a liquid, risks being a little calculated itself. There is a certain forced poignancy about these passages, notably the endings of chapters, perhaps because each section is constructed as a self-contained story, and demands its own emotional release. Perhaps also because sexuality is allotted an unfashionably small part in the workings of family destiny.

But inside the novel, Anne Tyler's insistence on giving fragments the respect due to wholes pays real dividends; characters like Cody may be creatures of reaction, shaped largely by circumstance, but they are not paralysed for that, and the book never seeks to explain too much or too little. Girls were attracted to Cody; when they met Ezra, who barely noticed them; the girls nevertheless took on a bright, sharp, arrested look, as if listening to a sound that others hadn't caught yet. For this lapse Cody never forgave them, and gradually withdrew. And yet, when at last a girlfriend of his disliked Ezra on sight, styles the despised motherly men, Cody's love interest was instant rather than gradual. Obviously Cody needed a more profound victory over his brother.

After the war Schindler's business drive went into a sudden decline; he failed in Argentina and then in Germany, and had to be helped out by his "people", now scattered over the world. Through their representations he was awarded a plaque to the Park of Heroes in Tel Aviv and declared a Righteous Person, one of the Just Gentiles. He died in 1974, at the age of sixty-six, living and loving and drinking like a young man until the end, and was buried in the Latin Cemetery of Jerusalem, "mourned", as this book, based on the testimony of the *Schindlerjuden*, concludes, "in every continent".

It is easy, Thomas Keneally remarks in *William Wharton's* *Birdy* and *Dad* both explored minds at the end of their tether, sensibilities retreating into fantasy when faced with the unbearable. For all their strengths, however, the impact of those two books was occasionally muffled by a wadding of sentimentalism. Determinedly, *A Midnight Clear* discards every shred of woolly comfort. It also displays another advance: *Birdy* and *Dad* each used two narrators, making for diffuseness; here, since there's only one, the story-line is kept as taut as the soldiers' nerves.

The novel opens with a brilliant young man tearing off his uniform and going back to his civilian life, ends with another tearing off his uniform and going back to his military life. In between is a no more than a number of bundle of sense impressions. In between is a welter of brainless, butchery, futile, fatuous expenditure of human resources. Mess, predominates, both

deprecatory prolegomena are part of that essential Schindler's Ark. Schindler could never have deceived the Army, the SS, the ministries, into believing that - apart from an odd partiality for Jews, but then, some Jews were women, and they knew about old Oskar - he was one of them. Even when he won a young Jewish housemaid from the insane camp commandant Goeth in a card game, this could be thought to show that he was one of them: a good sort, a sportsman, in possession of a robust, *echt-deutsch* sense of humour.

Quite apart from that, Keneally surely needn't have worried. However heart-warming Schindler's history is, we are not spared the surrounding horrors, victories of evil on a vastly greater scale than this one small triumph of good. The only extraneous incident which could conceivably be seen as life-enhancing, however equivocally, concerns Max Redlich, a notorious Jewish gangster, who was headed into the Stars Bozina synagogue (his first time in such a place) along with a crowd of orthodox believers. A "Special Duty" unit of the SD (*Sicherheitsdienst*) ordered them to spit on the Torah scroll. Both traditionalists and modernists could accommodate themselves to this, but not so Redlich, the unbeliever. "I've done a lot. But I won't do that." They shot him first, then all the rest.

Fouling up the system

D. J. Enright

THOMAS KENEALLY
Schindler's Ark
432pp. Hodder & Stoughton. £7.95.
0 340 27638 2

The story of *Schindler's Ark* is such a good one (and apparently a true one) that it seems amazing that it has never been written before. Such profitable escape and survival stories as, for example, *The Wooden Horse*, the inspiration (as this must surely be) of highly successful films, fade into insignificance beside it. (The two actors to whom Schindler is compared, George Sanders and Curt Jurgens, are, alas, no longer available to play the part.) The story itself is not so much amazing as - even though it must be true in essence - incredible.

In short, Oskar Schindler, a Sudeten-German businessman, followed the German army into Poland, acquired a Jewish enamelware factory, staffed it with Jews, set up a concentration camp of his own, fed, clothed and protected his workers, rescued 300 of his women who had been off-loaded at Auschwitz, and finally enabled some 1,200 prisoners to take over the camp as the war was ending. All this was achieved by dint of a perfunctory mixture of bohemian charm, bribes, blackmail and black market, the assiduous cultivation of senior officials in various departments of the Nazi machine and the playing-off of one power against another - plus an effusive sycobantism to be less than clearly visible.

In retrospect it is plain that, if anyone could achieve this particular manifestation of the impossible, it would have to be Oskar Schindler. Clearly a good normal vigorous German with a normal (if abnormally strong) appetite for food, drink and women, and - the nominal reason for taking abnormally good care of his "Jewish" workers - a powerful business drive. . . . One whose ambition was to be a folk hero, the wealthy prodigal, and who was ready to work hard and, naturally, cut a few corners to maintain that happy and legitimate state. In the sustained confidence trick he pulled off, alcohol was a prime instrument: when late in the story his factory was producing anti-tank shells which all turned out duds, he got visiting journalists sozzled that they couldn't see what was going on under their noses. In all of this he was helped by Jews of outstanding intelligence, resourcefulness and courage, yet there must also have been an element of what can only be called the miraculous.

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Schindler's Ark is not a great literary novel in the class of Thomas Mann's *Doctor Faustus*, not the kind of book that Grass or Böll might have created out of similar material. It is nearer to the documentary-style adventure stories of Hons Helmut Kirst (*Officer Factory*, *The Night of the Generals*), though less of an "entertainment", far more powerful and more significant in its theme. For better or for worse, symbolic overtones are rarely to be detected, and individual characters have little depth or definition. Schindler himself, while a vulgarly amiable with great fear and trembling than the Scarlet Pimpernel could ever command, remains an uncertain figure. Was he moved by compassion, by disgust with the Nazi regime? By (to begin with, at least) a capitalist's nature urge to do business freely? Was he a blend of gambler, sentimentalist and anarchist? Or motivated by a stubborn determination to keep his word to "his" Jews and preserve his honour as a good sport, a determination strengthened by three arrests and interrogations? Was it a zest for excitement, compensating for the futility of life with an ascetic

Emalia, the German Enamel Works, was not a holiday home. Prisoners worked long shifts, for Schindler had to deliver the goods, some of which came in handy as sweeteners: one of his SS contacts asked politely for half a gross of everything, soup bowls, plates, coffee mugs, and half a dozen large tureens, for his poor old bombed-out aunt in Bremen. The tone of the camp was "one of fragile permanence". Guards there were, on the perimeter, but Schindler kept them out of the camp on the grounds that their presence might impair his workers' efficiency;

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commentary

Benevolent landscapes of a malignant mind

Frances Spalding

John Linnell
Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge

At the age of fifty-nine, John Linnell retired to Redhill where he built Redstone Wood on the top of a hill overlooking fine views of the Surrey landscape. Over the years he acquired eighty of the surrounding acres. Much of it was woodland which he kept intact, rarely felling a tree. Like Ivon Hitchens's move to Sussex, where he too built a house on a piece of woodland which he allowed to grow wild, Redstone Wood proved the making of Linnell's career. For the next thirty years until his death in 1982 at the age of ninety he became England's most popular and prolific landscape artist. Inspired by his surroundings, but also aided by photographs and earlier sketches, he ignored the agricultural depression of the 1870s and painted reassuring pastorals in which carts laden with hay lumber through a benevolent landscape under a radiant sunset sky.

The sudden access of fame that accompanied the second half of Linnell's career is reflected in his prices. In 1848 he sold "The Last Gleam of the Storm" for £250 and twenty-four years later learnt that it had been resold at Christie's for £2,500. Only comparatively recently have his paintings begun to fetch more in the salerooms than they did in his heyday, for Linnell has been slower than most Victorian artists to recover from the severe reversal of posthumous reputation. This centennial exhibition offers a welcome opportunity to reassess the work of England's most successful landscape painter after the death of Turner. The catalogue by Katherine Croun, Cambridge University Press, £18.50, paper £5.95, 0 521 24737 3) amounts to the first book published on Linnell since Alfred T. Storey's biography of 1893.

Linnell's reputation has been blighted by more than changes in taste. His career has been overshadowed by those of his friends, Blake and Palmer,

and his name has been dogged by a singularly bad press. His forceful character invited dislike: he was opinionated, mean and suspicious; he used others for his own ends, drove hard bargains and was quick to quarrel. A resolute individualist and radical Nonconformist, he distrusted everything from shop-made bread to any form of religious observance that did not proceed from divine authority. Religious differences exacerbated his



Linnell's "The Last Load", 1875, from the exhibition reviewed here.

relationship with his son-in-law Samuel Palmer. Linnell's grandson, A. H. Palmer, at one time contemplated proving his father's declining fortune by overbearing father-in-law. Though he never fulfilled his intent, A. H. Palmer's manuscript notes have helped create the accepted image of Linnell, odious and malignant to the last.

This exhibition broadens appreciation, both of the man and of his art. Instructed by his teacher John Varley to "Go to Nature for everything", Linnell began in 1806 by painting outdoors with W. H. Hunt, pursuing, like Constable, a belief in natural painting. His early oils,

therefore, not only set an art historical precedent but also disclose his innate talent. The unfinished "Twickenham - Study from Nature" reveals the speed and precision with which he transformed a huddle of posts, tree-trunk and old rope into a low-toned, subtle harmony. His touch is at its most free in "Coast Scene at Cullercoats". Here, and in a small oil of Collins Farm, one can see why Alfred Storey suspected Constable, who opposed



Linnell's "The Last Load", 1875, from the exhibition reviewed here.

Linnell's election to the Royal Academy, of jealousy. Though Linnell wanted to paint landscapes, he spent the better part of his early career copying Old Masters and producing portraits. If those in the exhibition are a fair sample, his portraits are competent but dull, over-dependent on former styles. He evinces more enjoyment in his task when confined to miniatures in which he also specialized. "Portraits I painted to live," admitted this father of nine children, "but I lived to paint poetical landscapes." Commissions for landscape were at first rare. When in 1825 he painted "The Ferry, Itchen" for a distinguished collector, its uncompromising clarity, both in the

Exuberance on the bread line

Ronald Hayman

Almeida Theatre

Of Peter Brook's Attempts to burst theatrically through the language barrier, the most spectacular was made when he commissioned Ted Hughes to invent a new language and presented *Oz* in 1971 at the ruined palace of Darius the Great in Persepolis. His most determined attempt was made in 1972-3 when he took a multi-national group of actors on an African expedition to improvise performances in the villages and towns. The improvisational techniques had been evolved out of a long series of studio exercises and "work in progress" productions which started in 1963 when Brook and Charles Marowitz formed a company to produce a season at the LAMDA Theatre under the Artistic Directorship of C. R. G. Since 1970, when he formed his International Centre for Theatrical Research, he has made Paris his base, and his production of *Oz* a better opportunity than we have ever had in London to form an impression of the work done in Africa, although this is not an improvisation and only three of the seven actors, together with the percussionist, are members of Brook's Paris group.

In Africa he told the actors: "We've got no time to waste in soft thinking. The action must be full of something that makes people want to watch." By and large, audiences want to watch dancing and acrobatics, but he was not content with approximating to bushing or performances that might have been seen in a circus, though he had drawn

from both traditions, just as he has drawn from Gurdjieff, Artaud, Tai Chi and many other sources in his continuous struggle to find techniques for teaching the actor to become "so organically related within himself that the thinks with his body".

The actors in this production have an impressive vocabulary of non-vocal expression based on using their voices in a variety of expressive ways. The meaning of the words is only one channel of communication, and even if they had not interpolated anecdotes of English into the predominantly French dialogue, there would have been no difficulty in understanding what was going on. Admittedly the story is a simple one, reminiscent of folk comedy, with no psychological subtlety, but there is a delicious combination of sophistication and simplicity in the sounds and movements that these actors execute. Comedy should be partly a celebration of being alive, and the waves of goodwill that spread almost tangibly over the Almeida Theatre, show that the exuberance of the acting is infectious.

Naturalism is left far behind, and the exhibitions of emotion border on overacting, but there is so much precision in each sound and movement that there is no possibility of self-indulgence, and the very excessiveness of the emotionality seems to be making a statement about the co-presence of the violent and the violently threatening behaviour. The virtuoso exaggeration is at its best when Bruce Myers is hanging his head against a wall or losing it in a howl, and when Muller is lying in a way that is possible only when a convention is suspending a story between probability and improbability. It may be that one of Brook's reasons for involving himself with this Senegalese farce is that the subject of starvation never quite disappears. As in Shakespearean comedy, what is funny is made all the funnier by the occasional reminder of what isn't.

noises and shakings of the loose-pendulous mouth. This joke, aptly, is the starting point of the play, which will largely be concerned with what cannot be written down, and though I am reluctantly prepared to believe that a script exists, written by Birago Diop, it is the physicality of the performance and the improvisational asides that make the evening so delightful.

The basic conflict is between individual vengeance and the tradition of fraternal solidarity which is conducive to the wellbeing of an African village. Meat is a luxury which is seldom available here, and Mor Lam is determined to exclude his enemy, Moussa, from the meal that his wife, Awa, is preparing from the marrow of a dead goat. We are not used to farces that playing and the style of the Angel of Death (Clément Masdonag) make the subject quite palatable. Mireille Maboul is an amusingly distraught as Awa tries to persuade Mor Lam not to go too far, but once having decided that the only way to get rid of Moussa is by feigning disease, he has to go on making the illness more serious, and he is not a man to balk at getting himself buried. Some of Malik Bowen's clowning as Mor Lam may be reminiscent of circus, but the rigor of the farce keeps one of his legs in the air as he is being carried. The farce is funny in a way that is possible only when a convention is suspending a story between probability and improbability. It may be that one of Brook's reasons for involving himself with this Senegalese farce is that the subject of starvation never quite disappears. As in Shakespearean comedy, what is funny is made all the funnier by the occasional reminder of what isn't.

design and rendering of daylight, subtle various styles, momentarily adopting ink, and seems to have been aware of failure. He told Palmer that as progress could be made "in poor landscape unless the whole mind and time is devoted to it".

Not until the late 1840s did he arrive at a distinctive language of his own. The failure of his biblical landscapes, Katherine Croun suggests, was partly the result of his Protestantism, unlike the High Churchman William Deane, Linnell could not happily combine a native landscape with figure type drawn from the devotional art of Catholic Italy. Instead he made landscape itself the vehicle for religious expression, creating, Croun argues, a "system of symbols" out of barns, storms and sheep, rediscovering the mystical quality in nature which Blake and Palmer had celebrated. Simultaneously he began drawing with the brush in translucent washes, building up form through multiple strokes. This vibrant technique heightens the pantheistic mood, it gives the same focus to every part that figures merge with their surroundings; and its rhythmic pulse contributes to the compositional movement: both "The Rise of the River" and "The Coming Storm" join in urgency from this agitated handling.

In all the places he lived - Hampstead, Bayswater and Redhill - Linnell witnessed the steady erosion of the countryside; the spread of suburbs helped gild his dreams of a rural past. But if motivated by nostalgia, he, for the most part, avoided sentimentality. Unfortunately the poetic was uncovered in his late landscapes is inadequately represented in this show. After the uncertain nature of his career, this exhibition should be ended in triumph with, perhaps, Tate's "Noonday Rest", Absorbed "Under the Hawthorn" and Presail "The Fallen Monarch". Moreover the catalogue has been printed (and priced) as a book, it is a pity that it is concerned only with those pictures shown here. There is no discussion of the part played by Linnell's three painter sons in the factory-like production at Redstone Wood, nor of Linnell's experiments with media to attain transparency. Nevertheless the exhibition and its meticulously researched, considered catalogue will do much to arouse Linnell's long sleeping reputation. The exhibition remains at the Fitzwilliam Museum until December 12 and will then be shown at the Yale Center for British Art, January 25 - March 20, 1983.

The British Museum is showing until January 23 an exhibition, *Masterpieces of Printmaking from the 15th Century to the French Revolution*, which begins with the earliest German woodcuts, and includes work by Dürer, Rembrandt, Canaletto and Tiepolo.



Antonio Machado's painting, showing a figure in a landscape.

commentary

The withering of love

Alan Jenkins

Harold Pinter
Other Places
Collesloe Theatre

Two of the three short or very short pieces now offered as *Other Places* turn on Harold Pinter's self-conscious and lightly self-mocking stance with respect to his own by now familiar conventions: one is a stylized distillation of his remarkably consistent preoccupation with the family romance; the other an impatient and throwaway gesture towards a predicament he has always favoured, that of two men left alone in the dark, struggling for the upper hand and relying on the ever-present threat of a setting-out to mask fear and desire. The third is something of a new departure.

The young man on whose (unwritten?) thoughts or (unwritten?) letters addressed to his mother we eavesdrop throughout *Family Voices* has chosen his other place. It is a substitute home with all the glamour and burgeoning fantasy can confer: the social glamour of the scarlet Lady Withers and her icy family patronage, the sexual glamour of Jane, and the mother-comforts of the boozily glowing Mrs Withers, her romantic past and penchant for a cuddle. Throughout the bulletins, the abandoned mother of "real life" moves from desolation to piqued possessiveness in her replies, and her son's old dependency steadily reasserts itself; not, it is clear, out of sympathy for her plight, but out of growing awareness with his own set-up. The young man may be getting his Withers wrong, or so the shift of real tension and awareness, away from this comedy of sublimation in his dealings with the ladies, onto his encounters with the even more alarming menfolk, would imply. "I could crush a girl of my kind to death," says one, "a 'big man', a 'police man' by trade" called upon to exert a breathtaking self-discipline in the interests of staying on the right side of God. "This is a place of creatures up and down stairs... a catapulling regime of gross and ramshackle demeanours, opened up para-

phernal, follow me?" opines the other, older occupant. In the face of such grotesque passion and conviction the young man's jauntily affected knowledge melts away; he is left to the fold, the venomous ministrations of his mother, the vengeful shade of his father who died "in lamentation and pain" and whose voice speaks the most chilling words of the piece: "What I have to say to you will never be said." This small comic-horror masterpiece, first seen and heard last year, is expertly revived with Nigel Havers taking the part then played by the

naively thuggish Michael Kitchen: Havers seems less capable of having made it all up, but is no less compelling for that.

In *Victoria Station* a mini-cab driver languishing by the side of "a dark park" in Crystal Palace, and his increasingly demented controller wrestling over the airwaves with the former's stunned incomprehension and his own raging loneliness, sketch the outlines of a mutual dependency so desperate and so charged with misunderstanding that the controller's promise to "come down there" sounds like a death-threat and the driver's plaintive "Don't leave me" gasped into his car-radio sounds like the cry of a helpless child. The one in his darkened office, the other in his darkened cab, exchange the counters of their trade less and less convincingly, and both eventually give way to escapist fantasy. Fear and loathing in South London take on a music-hall air as the possibility of getting a cab to Victoria Station recedes and a double-act of intermittent and fading interest takes over: will control "go down there" or get the driver back for a nice cup of tea? Has the latter a Passenger On Board, a sleeping girl with whom he has fallen in love, as he says he has, and will he stay in Crystal Palace for ever? Has he perhaps killed the girl? Or assaulted her? Are these things even on his mind? The sketch remains a sketch, a brilliantly economical and quintessentially Pinterish idea that

never begins to look like a play; glowingly isolated faces mooned behind glass and the crackle of the intercom have, initially, a diffused irony and pathos, but the opportunities are wasted.

Victoria Station is not very far from Crystal Palace by car; whereas Alaska connotes in synoptic language a region of unimaginable remoteness and chill. This, a doctor tells his patient, is where her mind has been, for twenty-nine years; she has fallen victim to encephalitis and has woken to a world changed beyond recognition. The idea for *A Kind of Alaska* came, we are told, from Pinter's reading of Oliver Sacks's unforgettable and as a *donnée* it is almost unbearably affecting: the gradual breaking of the ice occupies the duration of the play, and Pinter's achievement is to have translated this idea into a wry and unselfish portrayal of anger, bewilderment and plucky intelligence facing out a single appalling fact. He is aided by the stunning performance of Judi Dench as Deborah, the patient; to a great extent a one-woman show, the piece still allows Paul Rogers and Anna Massey as the doctor and Deborah's sister, also his wife, to come into their own. Yet again, it is a drama of dependency - of a uniquely demanding and terrifying kind - and yet again it is the weave of family life that is evoked by Deborah's petulant or sharply ironic fragmented memories. A new family has

established itself around her in the place of the old (mother dead, father gone blind); the sister who has stayed by her has married the doctor but is "widowed" by his devotion to the "sleeping" girl; as Deborah learns her circumstances and attempts by short, stabbing asides to get "the master in proportion" (an unthinkable task) we come to recognize the depth and intensity of their dependence on her. Accounts of the onset of her sickness, her own recall of the "other place", between life and death, to which she has been condemned, and her first steps outside a hospital bed, are riveting; even more so are the slowly surfacing suggestion that she may in some obscure way have willed her withdrawal, and the moment when it looks as if she is about to retreat into it. The mystery of that withdrawal, and what the girl makes and fails to make of her translation by L. Dopa back into consciousness, are stated or implied with a marvellous sureness of touch; though necessarily cutting corners that were fully explored in *Awakenings* Pinter is nowhere in danger of travestying the humane vision behind his source. His own eye may be "clinical" in a sense Sacks would not approve, and his ear is for the gestures of stoical defence and self-preservation grimly familiar from his other plays; yet the compassion and humour of this piece manage to suggest a coming in from the cold rather than a complete surrender to it.

Simplicity and spontaneity

Stanley Wells

Shakespeare

Antony and Cleopatra
The Other Place, Stratford-upon-Avon

Adrian Noble's current production of *King Lear* at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre is a self-evident piece of director's theatre, as consciously interpretative as many a critical essay, neither more partial nor less interesting than most specimens of that genre. His *Antony and Cleopatra* is more self-effacing. The square playing-space offers merely a grey floor, an angled upper level, black walls, and a battery of lighting equipment. Production devices are sparing. Changes of location are subliminally signalled, by cold lighting for Caesar's Rome, a warmer tint for Cleopatra's Egypt. The only set-piece is the party on Pompey's gallery, which is demanded by the text. Admittedly, it is interpretatively angled: the song is performed on the upper level by a nearly naked, curiously pallid youth while his seniors dance below him, after which he swallows dyes into their upraised arms and ends up consoling Enobarbus. As Pompey, Clive Wood strips off his shirt, revealing his well-known ginger chest-hairs, and kisses Antony. There is a suggestion that the abundant sexuality of these warriors seeks satisfaction whatever the circumstances. One episode of foreboding is emphasized by the use of echo-devices. The scene in which soldiers on guard-duty hear music "under the stage", which they ascribe to the departure of "the god Hercules, whom Antony loved", is played on the upper level, the music supplied by humming from characters below, left sleeping from the previous scene, in an imaginative device, though one might confuse the unsophisticated playgoer.

For the rest, simplicity prevails. This is not to deny that the director has exercised firm control over the proceedings, shaping and pacing the action, and determining its emphases. Each scene moves fluently into the next, helped by George Fenton's admirably functional music and by shifts of lighting (for which Leo Lebedev earns exceptional credit). There are no processions, no 'dramboyant' fanfares. Properties and furnishings are minimal, costumes simple. Rank is only lightly differentiated. Cleopatra's robe during

most of the play is very similar to Charmian's, except that the latter's is less opaque. Regality is little regarded. The stress is on human beings in their personal relationships.

It is a legitimate mode. Probably it is bolder, drabber than that in which the play was conceived. But probably too it is truer to the original than the more conventional production style which essays a visual representation of the play's imagery. No production of *Antony and Cleopatra* seems ever to have provided a theatrical correlative to the text's poetic power. Is the fault Shakespeare's? Is this a play which can be fully realized only in the theatre of the mind?

Adrian Noble's production provides no final answer to these questions, but it does demonstrate that the text can be no less fascinating as chamber music than as grand opera. It is considerably pruned, mostly by the removal of luxuries within speeches. Some characters are doubled. One scene - showing Ventidius's triumph - is, as commonly, omitted. But by and large this is a faithful representation of Shakespeare's play which places the burden of responsibility on actors' realizations of their roles. And this is appropriate, because the play is the product of a phase in Shakespeare's career in which he appears to have been particularly concerned with human individuality and its effects on national destiny.

Unfortunately, the drabness of setting is reflected in some of the acting. Bob Peck, in his earlier scenes, plays Enobarbus as a puritan satirist; he is dismissive, reductive. "The barge she sat in..." lacks wonder, gives no sense of a man who has been moved in spite of himself. But he and his director, between them, create a marvellous stillness for his death scene. As Antony, Michael Gambon seems not yet to have the measure of the small theatre. He is often too loud, sometimes too quick. On the press night, at least, he treated the verse roughly and was verbally inept. Generally unimpressive, he shows little tenderness, and seems too much the lord and owner of his face to convey the character's varying passions. Emotion is often generalized or expressed in fluctuating responses of mind, body and language. He is more credible as the soldier than the lover, convincingly overcome by shame in defeat and excitingly fierce in battle.

The human immediacy of the

production pays off in Jonathan Hyde's unusually impulsive Octavius Caesar. There is touching warmth in his relationship with his sister, Octavia (Penelope Besumont), and in his indignation at Antony's betrayal of her. Charmian and Ira are sensitively played by Sonia Cusack and Josette Simon. But the production is principally memorable for Helen Mirren's bewitching Cleopatra. Shakespeare's language comes from her with such spontaneity that it would be easy to underestimate the intelligence, imagination and technical mastery that lie behind this performance. Slim and beautiful, she moves with the fluent grace of a dancer and speaks with the precise but imperceptible control of a musician. Her volatility is wholly credible, the transitions of emotion effortlessly effected between, for example, her affectionate jesting with her women and her subsequent ferocity with the messenger who brings news of Antony's marriage to Octavia.

She is finest in the role's greatest stretches, from Antony's death to her own. Waiting to see how Octavius Caesar will treat her, she appears in black, her face besmirched, dragging a bloodstained blanket. Her refusal to be led in triumph is immensely dignified, achieving a sense of transformation while never allowing us to lose sight of her vulnerable femininity. Her memories of Antony, created as a transforming vision of him, but she crumples into tears when Dolabella denies the validity of her dream. Clive Wood (doubling Dolabella with Pompey) helps us to believe that Dolabella finds her "great". Her former spirit shows itself in her rating of Seleucus, and in the comedy with which she invests her comment on Caesar's exit, "He-wards me, girls, he-wards me..." But this detracts no whit from the majesty of her last moments. With washed cheeks she resumes her former beauty as, for the first time, we see her invested in the parody of queenliness, "Triumph! I come!" There is no false rhetoric; the text is played for what it is, with no attempt to overlay it with concepts of what tragedy should be like. Cleopatra has been considered an unplayable role; Helen Mirren shows unequivocally that it is a great one.

Pinter's *Other Places* is published by Methuen (50pp., £5.95, £2.95 paperback, 0 413 50710 6). They also publish *Other Places* by Pinter (11pp., £5.95, £2.95 paperback, 0 413 49490 X).

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Oxford University Press

Eric Korn

So much for the author's Stalkydom. In common knowledge that there are other aspects to his personality, for he is written elsewhere of his thirty-five years in the Army. "Stalky's" chief interest is what he calls his civilian recreation. From what he tells us about it the problem to which it refers

Jonson and Shakespeare

Swift and Temple

'Still Waters'

Grosseto, Italy. ROBERT BRAIN.

'Monsignor Quixote'

W. H. Hudson

'Rocket to the Moon'

also to the sexual forces of the day. What he thought about these latter he never revealed, but a Grétry opera had on him "rather an effect of enchantment than of art". Later, the theatre awakened Adams's critical spirit to its first cultural observations. In London he compared English acting, which he found affected, with what he judged to be a more convincing style practised in France. In Paris he observed that whereas in a dispute about seating a French usher had decided in favour of a gentleman, in England the opposite would have been the case.

I ever had, to repress my feelings." If ever there was a society ideally suited to systematic repression, the America that Adams had returned to was it. In Europe a proper young man like himself was for the most part kept away from young girls, and certainly could look down on a star at sexually explicit old women. But that was restrained, not repressed. In America one found oneself alone in a room with girls, and escorted them home with one's hands. Nevertheless what looked like unrestrained freedom rested entirely on repression.

Sept.-town, New England, and

Only the theatre touched John Kennedy enough to provoke comment in the daily. During his first week in Spain he reported that "the actors are very different", a comment that seems to be one of the adults in the American story. But within a short time his own observations proved to be surprisingly sophisticated: clearly, the theatre genuinely engaged his sensibility. By the age of sixteen Adams had been exposed not only to the classical theatre and contemporary opera, but

"I consider it the greatest misfortune that can befall a young man to be in Love", Adams told himself: "I have still more Reason than

Adams fell easily enough into the social styles of his homeland. He objected to the conspicuous consumption represented by the gardens and ponds built by a wealthy

By now the onerous task of keeping his "Daily Narrative of Yesterdays", the diary, had become a measure of his tenacity in general. Later in life the

The return of John and Adams from Europe suggests that young John's condition is viewed as certain light both explanations can be accepted. Everything that John wrote about his ambivalent responsibilities points to his sense of his father especially. Yet he never imposed upon him. This was turned twenty-one because he was now emancipated "from the paternal authority which I felt." Not surprisingly, then, when he began to collapse, he rushed rather than away from his parents—he was not mistaken in doing so. In contact with them he quite lost sight of himself. He was not alone. He also recovered at the family sufficiently to return to New York.

Given the high-toned and

An End to Silence represents a selection, prepared by Professor Cohen and translated by George W. Allen, of materials appearing in thirty complete and eleven partial issues of the journal transmitted to the West by Medvedev. (Other issues were withheld, according to Medvedev, because they contain material which

Despite all his compulsive thoroughness, John Quincy managed to leave a personal record far less intimate than the diary form might seem to promise. He rarely looked forward so that his character and

Characteristically, John Gribble continued to read his law books, to work at finishing Glibbon, and to make a presumable for relaxation, Oliver's *Benedictine* (a favourite of his father's). His breakdown can be said to provide the modern belief that children should be spared from the inevitably demanding pressures of explicitly voiced, even if not parental expectations. Yet this idea was somehow fated to survive. An unreasonable pressures that he escaped on himself even by way of cure. His recovery renewed his faith in depression and its emblem, the unicorn, and thenceforth the two would walk again find him.

Sadhora's In

Gillian Graffy

(Daves (Editor))

Biography in Memoirs Letters, and Documents

Ann Arbor: Ardis. \$22.50.

493 3.

Esenin is a poet generally out of

with Western scholars, despite

McVay's illuminating, and

Esenin: A Life (Ardis 1976)

Sadhora and Esenin

his law studies in Newburyport. One day he reported a "depression of spirits" to which I have hitherto been merely a "stranger". This was accompanied by "the most extravagant delirium". Two months later he suffered a "week of 'low spirits'". He began to find it impossible to adhere to his study routine and shifted to making one-centuries in his diary. A few months later on he had to ask the local physician for an opiate in order to sleep. He then decided to return to his

...ally, to view of the
... must pass before the poetry of the
... Quincy Adams press print, it was
... have been convenient to have
... appendix containing "An Epistle
... Malala", his poem about "Miss New
... Malala". Here John Quincy
... expressed the aspirations of his son
... father when he wrote that other
... were carried away by Miss
... Malala's charms.

Translated by George Saunders
375pp. Norton. £14.25.
0 191 01491 6

have realized that, at the very least, the contents of all issues published in the USSR should have been made available.) Cohen hoped to do this with the *Political Diary* which Peter Reddaway did so well with in the underground *Chronicle of Current Events* in his compilation *Uncensored Russia* (1972); to provide a series of the journal's central themes. This Cohen has sought to accomplish by dividing the *Diary's* contents into six sections entitled "The Crimes of the Stalin Era," "Guilt and Responsibility," "Neo-Stalinism," "Currents of Society," "Opinion and Dissent," "August 1956: The Winter of Communist

It was therefore a splendid idea of Davies to offer this biography in the form of memoirs, letters and documents as "an approach to the introduction of Eisenstein to the English-speaking reader". The volumes contain three essays by Eisenstein, the Manifesto Declaration, extracts from his correspondence, twenty pages of photographs and, in its main section, Eisenstein through the eyes of his contemporaries. There is no index, and too little room mentioned in the text. Davies regrets in her introduction the pressures of space have made her write for a separate edition the critical notes she had hoped to include. She

How important a publication was *Political Diary*? Clearly, a *samizdat* journal limited to five copies (which were circulated among its forty-five readers) can have only the most narrow dissemination. The journal was, by choice and design, an elitist organ. Still, certain of its contributors – for self-evident reasons, Medvedev is unable to name most of them – appear to have been of considerable influence. Academician Sakharov, for example, until 1968, a regular reader (though in the 1970s he moved away from Medvedev's neo-Marxist positions), and Aleksandr Tvardovsky, the editor of *Novy mir*, an irregular one. The list

Medvedev and his colleagues are almost startlingly optimistic, believing that there are "objective" reasons for hope in the future. "The scientific and technical revolution . . ." Medvedev writes, "will bring about changes in the social structure and in its economic base that will prove incompatible with the basis of the unlimited rule by a single individual (or by a small group). The notes in a small vein that advances in communication technology will soon make it impossible for the USSR to obstruct the flow of information from other countries. The Brezhnev régime has, of course, attempted to avoid this by purchasing (and, if need be, by pilfering) the advanced technology which its unwieldy system has been unable to provide; as for the 'flow of information' better known as 'surrendered information' built through a gross expense, to block or garble transmissions from abroad.

Amalrik thought that the ideology most likely to emerge supreme was particularly in a time of crisis—such as, by food shortages—was "National Bolshevism" or "Neostalinist nationalism", a variety of Russian nationalism enjoying significant support in the Party-state apparatus. Since, however, National Bolshevism—the term goes back to émigré professor Nikolai Berdyaev in the 1920s—was a movement in the early 1920s, ideology with appeal only for ethnic Russians, Amalrik felt that the post-Brezhnev leadership might hesitate to adopt it, fearing the reaction of the minority nationalities who, after all, make up half the population of the USSR. In that case, he believed, the régime would be especially in a time of crisis, to lean in the direction of "liberal Marxism". Once stabilized in power, liberal Marxists would be likely to fall under the influence of "liberal democratic" ideology (ie, the tendency represented by Amalrik).

Medvedev and his associates do not exhibit much sympathy towards nationalism (not surprisingly, since they are convinced Marxists) and demonstrate even less sympathy towards religion. But if William Fletcher is correct — and his estimate is based on extensive published research by Soviet sociologists of religion — some 45 per cent of the Soviet population remain religious believers. What, one wonders, does Medvedev have to offer to contemporary Lithuanians, Georgians, Armenians, Western (ie, United Catholic) Ukrainians, and to the some thirty-five million adherents of the Russian Orthodox Church and the Transcaucasus, not to speak of five million or so Russian Orthodox Christians?

It should also be noted that present-day National Bolsheviks and Slavophiles may not be as hapless in dealing with the minority nationalities as is often believed. Certainly their writings show that they are well aware of the problem. One finds suggestions for the institution of a "real federalism," for the withdrawal of ethnic Russian migrants from the borderlands, and, even in the ranks of the "official nationalists," a preparedness to countenance the secession of "republican peoples" from the Soviet Union. The RSFSR, Ukraine, and Belorussia, plus such heavily "Russified" areas as Kazakhstan and Orthodox Christian areas, such as Georgia, represent, according to such apokosmen, a more than adequate base for a powerful modern state.

One must be grateful to Stephen Cohen, and to George Saunders, for providing us with a judiciously chosen and readable selection of materials from an important *samizdat* publication. And Medvedev himself is to be commended for his organizational skills and dutiful labours. Western specialists on the Soviet Union, whatever their political sympathies, cannot be indifferent to the wealth of material which Medvedev and his associates have amassed.

now only the filthy tapping of the rain
now only heavy coats and squealing shoes
now only the din of steamed-up cheap cabs
now only trodden sawdust on the stone
now only mouldy buns in cellophane
now streetlights decomposing in this fog
the advice given by a friendly cop
the last drink bought with the last of the small change
now only the tram-Island's desolation
now only the variable course of the night wind
rushlog through a tangle of alleys to no end
now only the unfinished excavations
the night's prospecting-hole its weeds and thorns
now only shivering now only yawns

Translated from the Hungarian by Clive Wilner and George Gohari
(György Petri was born in Budapest in 1943.)

What a feast for a life actually in process of being lived these letters have provided. They breathe the very spirit of the man, and they bring Byron and his circle of friends before our eyes as no biography has ever done or can ever hope to do. Robert Nye *In The Guardian* £12.50

David Macmillan removes the picturesque veneer and for all nonits conventional role as a late 18th-century transition between Neo-classical regularity and Romantic imagination. He traces its antecedents in Gothic and Chinoiserie, its strong continuing influence through Repton, Nash and the early Victorians, and its late flowering with Arts and Crafts, Norman Shaw, Lutyens and the Garden City Movement. Fully illustrated \$25.00

JOHN MURRAY

[REDACTED]

Thinking up reality

David Papineau

PAUL K. FEYERABEND

Philosophical Papers:
Volume 1, Realism, Rationalism,
and Scientific Truth. Volume 2,
Problems of Empiricism

353pp. and 255pp. Cambridge
University Press. £22.50 and £17.50.
0 521 22897 2 and 0 521 23564 8

In 1962 Paul Feyerabend's article "Explanation, Reduction and Empiricism" appeared in *Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science*, vol III. If philosophy had overnight sensations, this would have been one. A senior colleague of mine still recalls how he hurried round the department drawing attention to the article, as one might to news of some major public disaster. This was the same year as T. S. Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Between them the philosopher Feyerabend and the historian Kuhn turned academic thinking about science upside down. Until then the philosophy of science had been a pretty dull affair. With few exceptions it had pictured science as accumulating truth through observation and experimental discovery. There was, it is true, some debate about the status of theoretical hypotheses (about gravitational forces, say, or sub-atomic particles) which went beyond what observation guaranteed. But whatever their exact status, it was generally agreed that such theories played an essentially secondary role, somehow tidying up after the serious business of uncovering empirical facts was done.

For Kuhn and Feyerabend scientific facts were made, not discovered. As they had it, the course of science was directed far more by the autonomous creation of speculative theories than by new experimental results. Indeed they questioned the very idea of objective "experimental results" existing independently of their changing theoretical surroundings. Thus, for example, even everyday observations of moving bodies were argued to depend for their meanings on variable assumptions about the causes of motion and the structure of space and time.

Of course the apparent implication, that even scientific truth was in the end just a matter of opinion, seemed somewhat absurd. But it was difficult to ignore the awkward questions that Kuhn and Feyerabend raised about the orthodox picture of science. For one thing, their apparently extreme views about observation could call on some respectable philosophical support. The rejection of the "given", of the idea that sensory awareness gives us unimpeachable access to the data, blinds together a surprising number of contemporary philosophical schools: it joins the British linguistic tradition of Wittgenstein, Quine and Austin to the American neo-pragmatism of Quine and Sellars, and there are similar ideas in French structuralism and post-structuralism. It is true that the specific thesis of the "theory-dependence of observation" adds something to this general philosophical theme. But the links are close, and indeed the first piece reprinted in these *Philosophical Papers* is a slightly obscure early article in which Feyerabend argues explicitly from a version of Wittgenstein's private language argument to the conclusion that it is only in the context of a surrounding theory (as in Wittgenstein's "language-games") that observation reports have meaning.

However, doubts about the authority of observation were only a part of Kuhn and Feyerabend's radicalism. Most philosophers, both inside and outside the philosophy of science, originally saw such doubts as merely of specialist interest. After all, did not the example of modern science show that it must somehow be possible to build up objective knowledge of how things are, however exactly the trick was done? What Feyerabend and Kuhn added in the early 1960s was the historical claim that, far from displaying a steady accumulation of knowledge, modern science kept on changing its mind. And this was not just a matter of philosophers correcting old ones, but of radically

subverting them, of completely changing the conceptual spectacles through which the world is viewed. The idea of such conceptual ruptures was familiar from other areas of thought: what was surprising was the claim that the same thing happened within the history of even such hard sciences as physics, chemistry and astronomy.

Kuhn and Feyerabend drew rather different morals from this conceptual variability. Kuhn introduced the now hackneyed term "paradigm" to convey the way certain patterns of thought would hold sway for extended periods in any given area, until their replacement in a brief, traumatic "revolution". Feyerabend on the other hand saw science as permanent revolution. Even if scientists in practice sometimes lapsed into Kuhnian conservatism, there was always a role for the proliferation of alternative conceptual approaches.

But these differences about the frequency of change were of little significance beside their underlying agreement on the fact of conceptual variability. For this agreement meant it was no longer possible to view the theory-dependence of observation as merely of local interest. If observation depended on theory, and if theories retained no part of preceding views, then there seemed no avoiding the conclusion that each theory made its own world, and that choices between them were ultimately arbitrary. As Kuhn and Feyerabend independently came to describe it, competing theories in science were *incommensurable*, for lack of any common basis against which they might be evaluated.

Over the past two decades the philosophical reputations of Kuhn and Feyerabend have undergone a curious reversal. Originally Feyerabend was taken rather more seriously. Nobody liked his conclusions very much. But it

was allowed that he did serious philosophical work along his way to reaching them. Kuhn by contrast seemed a philosophical lightweight. Whatever his merits as a historian, he tended to overreach himself when articulating his epistemological views, and could appear naive when defending them. But recently Feyerabend's philosophical star has waned. And at the same time, and without any noticeable period of re-evaluation, reputable philosophical commentators have taken to referring to Kuhn as one of the major thinkers of the twentieth century.

Part of the reason for this is that Kuhn has become far more circumspect in his philosophical pronouncements. He now avoids the more tendentious of his earlier claims, and indeed is prepared to allow that there might perhaps be agreed standards with respect to which science can be seen as progressing. Feyerabend, on the other hand, has been moving with increasing speed in the opposite direction. Much of his recent work has been devoted to disproving precisely what Kuhn has been prepared to concede. He has attacked all attempts (most notably those of Imre Lakatos) to articulate principles of rationality which might accommodate the discontinuity of scientific theorizing. Feyerabend now advocates not only the proliferation of theories, but also the proliferation of methodological standards. In his view the history of even our modern Western scientific tradition displays no particular methodological pattern - different scientists have upheld different methodological principles, and some have upheld none at all. And from this he argues that Western science is just one tradition amongst many, with no special claim to authority. As to the supposed technological advances of Western

science, Feyerabend instances such alternative technologies as acupuncture and shamanism, and, for good measure, asks why technological efficacy should be so important anyway. These views go a long way beyond his earlier ones. They have won him some new friends (his last two works were both published by New Left Books), but academic critics have not surprisingly been quite unsympathetic.

Most of these *Philosophical Papers* are more than ten years old, and even the more recent ones have been selected for philosophical substance rather than intensity of debate. And there is some new material, in the form of introductory remarks at various points, which goes some way towards showing why Feyerabend is not simply the poseur he has so often seemed to be.

Of particular interest are his remarks on realism, a subject on which he has for some time had little explicit to say. Back in the 1960s realism was to do with the status of the unobservable entities postulated by scientific theories. On this question Feyerabend's views favoured realism, if only because of his downgrading of observables. But now that the battle is over, the question is whether anything has properties objectively "out there" independently of the way they are shifted. Little as we may like Feyerabend in the driving seat, he has actually done the historical work to show that same men with good knowledge within Western science without, have held all kinds of different intellectual values. As Feyerabend, simply gesturing in the direction of some supposed common intellectual commitment is no longer going to hold relativism at bay, he has made it very clear that he sees how we can continue believing the one true theoretical way.

were once true, but have now ceased to be so.

This might just seem like silliness from Feyerabend. But it is his epistemological anarchism which has a more sense when set in the general context of doubt about realism. In the last couple of years we have seen such figures as Putnam and Richard Rorty argue directly that rejection of the notion "the given" means the abandonment of realism: if we ever have direct access to anything, there is no point in what an absolute reality can get us a story. But while thus conceding that reality is in some sense constituted by our intellectual investigations, rather than providing an independent ground for them, these writers would prefer to avoid Feyerabend's relativism. Instead they offer the suggestion that language in intellectual activity are values which will eventually channel different theoretical approaches in a common direction.

The importance of Feyerabend that he shows this easy way out cannot be taken for granted. As long as we are at the back of our minds the idea of independent reality to pull through the right direction, Feyerabend's insistence on the inherent diversity of possible standards is merely provocative. But without really the onus of argument is shifted. Little as we may like Feyerabend in the driving seat, he has actually done the historical work to show that same men with good knowledge within Western science without, have held all kinds of different intellectual values. As Feyerabend, simply gesturing in the direction of some supposed common intellectual commitment is no longer going to hold relativism at bay, he has made it very clear that he sees how we can continue believing the one true theoretical way.

unreal. I agree with Strawson against America, that there is a true fruit-lime here; and it is one of the main tasks of philosophy to indicate a basic instability in Kant's whole attempt to secure a basis for knowledge by erecting a conceptual edifice out of the phenomenal realm, of which knowledge is possible, from noumenal realm, of which we have no determinate knowledge. Strawson appears to break out in a cold sweat at the thought of the phenomenal realm just where Kant had hoped to pre-empt it.

Kant's general strategy of trying to set transcendental limits to philosophy generates automatically a consequent distortion of meaning or to the realm and the noumenal realm, restricting empirical science to an explanation of the order of appearances, he hoped to secure from doubt, just as he hoped to restrict the ambitions of the sciences to an exclusive concern with the security of its own motives by securing it an independent "unconditioned" status.

The book's aim is deceptive because it is in fact deeply packed with a wide range of ideas. If any reader should still cherish illusions of the "morality" of medieval thought, this book should be sufficient to dispel them. Yet there are guiding threads stated by Tierney himself in his introduction: his programme is to consider, during the period 1150-1250, the development of the medieval mind, side by side, ecclesiastical and political ideas about the state. Such a dualistic approach immediately suggests comparison with J.N. Figgis and Tierney himself is not far from the resemblance: he tells us very nearly called his own book *Grail and Grotius*, thus neatly combining the gentry assembled to do the king's business and their own. This was a "court" in many senses: an enclosed space within whose four benches judgments were given; a tribunal presided over by officers of the crown; and a courtly gathering where

The Marcher mentality

Gwyn Jones

ROBERT BARTLETT

Grail of Wales 1146-1223
266pp. Oxford University Press.
£19.50.
0 19 821892 3

Robert Bartlett has written a close-knit, well-documented explanatory book about one of our more abundantly self-documenting and self-explanatory men, who happens to be one of the best Latin historians of the twelfth century and one of its most readable writers of prose: Gerald of Wales. Gerald of Wales, and still to most Welshmen Gerald of Wales, Gerald the "life and works" we have long been waiting, but whoever writes that work will be glad to have it. *Grail of Wales* began life as a book arranged under three heads and subdivided into seven chapters: Part I, Politics and Nationality (1. "Gerald of Wales or Gerald the Welshman"; 2. "The Grail of Wales"; 3. "Kings"; 4. "The Grail of Wales"; 5. "The Grail of Wales"; 6. "The Grail of Wales"; 7. "The Grail of Wales"). It is published by Oxford Historical Monograph.

Gerald was born, probably in 1146, in a Member in Pembrokeshire, a

place he described in choice Latin as the most delectable in Wales. He was born of mixed Norman and Welsh blood in troubled times when Welsh princes and Marcher barons were forever fighting, feuding, scheming, and not infrequently intermarrying, with the Angevin kings of England. He was the third son of William de Barri and Angharad, daughter of Gerald de Windsor, castellan of Pembroke, and Nest, princess whose beauty and charm, plus a somewhat rebellious abductions and a selection of high-born extra-marital fathers for her children (her lovers included King Henry I of England) earned her the title of "the Helen of Wales." Gerald was thus a young man with everything to hope for and a good deal to expect. He settled for an ecclesiastical career so early, he tells us, that while his brothers were building sand-castles he was building sand-churches. Between 1162 and the late 1170s he spent long periods at the University of Paris, perfecting himself in theology, law and the classics, and whetting his zeal for church reform.

In 1175 his uncle David FitzGerald, Bishop of St David's and another of the Brecon, whose aged incumbent had been removed for keeping a concubine, Gerald's foot was now on the ladder of success, and after the Bishop's death the following year he must have seemed that all he had to do was keep on climbing. He was promptly disillusioned. His restless

activity and reiterated assaults upon what he called ecclesiastical crimes but weaker men thought reasonable accommodations were upsetting a lot of people; and the king and the Archbishop of Canterbury had no wish whatever to elevate this disputatious, vain, touchy, energetic, and potentially dangerous young man to this of all seats. The election went to Peter de Leia, Prior of Wenlock, a setback which was to prove decisive for Gerald's entire career.

For a full demonstration of this we must look forward some twenty or more years to 1198-1203, when the see of St David's once more fell vacant and Gerald committed himself with all his being to a renewed candidature. In the short run he had grounds for hope, for the local chapter was induced to elect him. But he still had to get past the English king, now King John, whom long ago he had accompanied as a kind of tutor to Ireland, and Hubert Walter, Archbishop of Canterbury, to say nothing of the Papacy itself. By now Gerald had a lot of black marks chalked up against him. He had long been a pertinacious critic of the Angevins, especially as part of his campaign to justify and glorify his Marcher kinsmen. "O family, O race!" he had declaimed in the *Expugnatio Hibernica*, "Capable of the conduct of any kingdom by yourself alone, I envy, I am proud of you, but I am not descended from on high. O, if they had found a prince who weighed the merit of their great efforts justly. . . . Or one of those long-echoing prophetic sentences that Gerald the rhetorician

had at command: "What can we expect? Should we hope for any help from our own race? We are in the grip of a law that just as we are Englishmen to the Irish, so we are Irish to the English." As for his Welshness, his British pride, arbitrarily acquired, fervently exploited, and brisily discarded - nothing could be more guaranteed to earn him both royal and archiepiscopal disfavour. For what a lot they were, these Welsh: wild, violent, rebellious in their own country, given to wife-swapping, perjury, poetry, and the habit of finishing their choruses together on a flat. No prospects there, quite apart from the added pitfall of an overweening national pride.

For Gerald was now shifting the emphasis of his election by insisting that St David's was not just one more bishopric on a far western strand, but metropolitan see, no less, and therefore independent of Canterbury. Its bishop should be recognized as not just a bishop, but an Archbishop, and above and beyond that a Primate. Outwitted and denied at home, he thrice carried his case to Rome, and thrice failed to establish it with Pope Innocent III. Till now Gerald had been on the Welsh side of the divide between the country and keep Welsh armies out of England's cherished soil. His suggestions for exterminating the Welsh and abolishing their liberties to nature and wild beasts reads like a piece of Swift's *Modest Proposal*, without the irony. And though for literary and historical reasons posterity

must be profoundly grateful that Gerald accompanied Archbishop Baldwin on his Welsh itinerary of 1185, in so doing he lent support to Baldwin's assertion of the authority of the Canterbury over Wales - and St David's.

But now the wicked English were thwarting the rights and interests of Wales and Gerald together. What more natural, more human, more typical of Gerald than to espouse, confuse, and so identify the nation's cause with his? It made no difference to the holders of power. By 1203 he was seeking a face-saving formula or two, accepted defeat and a modest pension, and left the arena. He would go on writing, in large measure about himself and his affairs, private and public, till his death in 1223.

Dr Bartlett's bibliographical rather than biographical approach to his subject, together with his detailed characterization of Gerald's ideas, attitudes, and intellectual milieu, can leave no one in doubt that there is an intriguing man (no pun is intended) and an author of considerable skill, eloquence and diversity. A chapter like "The Face of the Barbarian", which explores Gerald's views on race, peoples, the ordering of society, warfare, livelihoods, language and the like, shows how wide his world of knowledge and speculation was. The more imminent world of "Kings" shows his principles and prejudices in lively display. *Grail of Wales* is a useful contribution to the history of ideas at a particular time and in respect of a remarkable man.

More authorities than me

John Morrall

MIAN TIERNEY

English Law, and the Growth of Constitutional Thought, 1150-1650
216pp. Cambridge University Press.
£12.50.
0 521 23493 6

This little book by a distinguished scholar of medieval Canon Law and political thought is substantially a condensed version of the Wiles Lectures delivered in 1979 in the Queen's University of Belfast. This lecture series is intended, in the words of its Trust, "to encourage the extension of historical thinking into the realm of general ideas", and Brian Tierney has amply fulfilled this aim.

Modern political thought has been subject to gross popularization and distortion by the media, and the result is a kind of "research literature" which, though necessary and valuable in themselves, have remained unlooked at by any general synthesis: some of the ablest scholars in the field have managed to exemplify both will to an exclusive concern with the security of its own motives by securing it an independent "unconditioned" status.

The book's aim is deceptive because it is in fact deeply packed with a wide range of ideas. If any reader should still cherish illusions of the "morality" of medieval thought, this book should be sufficient to dispel them. Yet there are guiding threads stated by Tierney himself in his introduction: his programme is to consider, during the period 1150-1250, the development of the medieval mind, side by side, ecclesiastical and political ideas about the state. Such a dualistic approach immediately suggests comparison with J.N. Figgis and Tierney himself is not far from the resemblance: he tells us very nearly called his own book *Grail and Grotius*, thus neatly combining the gentry assembled to do the king's business and their own. This was a "court" in many senses: an enclosed space within whose four benches judgments were given; a tribunal presided over by officers of the crown; and a courtly gathering where

ecclesiastical, with whom he felt less at home.

There is, however, a considerable continuity in outlook between Figgis and Tierney: both are drawn to a tradition of pluralist thinking about human society, and Tierney in particular points that this tradition was itself over its "original" medieval tendency to create in both ecclesiastical and secular spheres what was not yet talk about "the State" in interlocking system of communities, each with its own claim to legal autonomy, within a commonly accepted hierarchical structure. He believes that this pluralism, which has perhaps been modern society's principal bulwark against an all-encompassing sovereign State, owes far more to medieval thought and practice than it does to that of Greece and Rome - despite the undoubted preference of the early modern publicists for appeal to classical rather than medieval authorities. The preference suggests Tierney, was due to the desire of sixteenth and seventeenth-century thinkers,

Humanist and/or Protestant, to distance themselves from their medieval roots. One might add that the sixteenth and seventeenth-century Scholastics, such as Suarez and Bellarmine, a group who, strangely, have received little attention from the pluralist and collegiate character of the Church hierarchy, has been neglected by general historians of political thought. The ecclesiastical in question contended the authority of bishops derived not directly from the Pope (although they did see him as the divinely appointed head of the Church) but, as John of Paris put it, from "God and the people". The parallel with the kind of qualification of royal power which the secular baronage in Western European kingdoms was attempting to make during the same period is fascinating, and a tinge of irony is added by Tierney's demonstration of the debt of Marsiglio of Padua (a "centralist" and anti-pluralist if ever there was one) to the arguments of these forgotten ecclesiastical authors against the Papacy's exclusive Petrine claims. Tierney in fact suggests that Marsiglio's theory of consent was

probably originally ecclesiastical before being applied to secular political authority. He sees the pluralism which these ecclesiastical writers defended as being the ancestor of later, more secularized "federalist" theories of political authority, down to the United States Constitution with its aim of reconciling local autonomy with a certain measure of central direction. The same interplay between secular and ecclesiastical ideas is shown to exist in the concepts of corporate rulership and mixed constitution, to which an illuminating chapter is devoted. Tierney believes that we now badly need a systematic study of ecclesiastical theories of the consent of the mixed constitution: the purely historical value of which would be increased by the light it would shed on present debates on the nature of leadership within the Church. Indeed, not the least of the merits of Tierney's own valuable survey is the sense which it conveys of the unexhausted fertility and creative continuity of the Western constitutional tradition in both its sacred and secular branches.

The shire in session

M. T. Clanchy

ROBERT C. PALMER

The County Courts of Medieval England 1150-1350
360pp. Guildford: Princeton
University Press. £26.
0 691 05341 3

The county court is one of England's oldest institutions but it has attracted few historians since the Victorians. For Stubbs the Anglo-Saxon shire court was "a monument of the original independence of the population which it represents. . . the chief council of the ancient Anglo-Saxon democracy is now discredited; the fact remains that the county was a structured community from the time of King Edgar in the tenth century until the reorganization of local government in 1974."

In the Middle Ages the county and its court were synonymous. At regular meetings the gentry assembled to do the king's business and their own. This was a "court" in many senses: an enclosed space within whose four benches judgments were given; a tribunal presided over by officers of the crown; and a courtly gathering where

the knights of the shire talked and competed in accomplishment. Although by the fourteenth century many of the county's judicial functions had been delegated to special commissioners like coroners and royal justices, it still flourished as a political and administrative assembly; and it would do so for centuries to come. With the growth of Parliament, the county court became the essential link between Westminster and the localities.

Historians have shied away from the medieval county court because its records are sparse whereas its functions were manifold. Robert C. Palmer has already established himself as the authority on these records and has even found some new ones (see reports from *Warwickshire* dating from c. 1303). He is one of the new generation of American scholars who are putting fresh life into English legal history. In this his first book he demonstrates his unique knowledge of the manuscript sources in the British Library and the Public Record Office.

He addresses himself primarily to technical problems concerned with the court's jurisdiction and functioning in non-criminal litigation, as his chapter headings indicate: "Venue and 'Scheduling'; 'Suit' and 'Judges'; 'Record, Removal, and Supervision';

"The Viacontiel Writ"; "Personal Actions". Even a chapter with a broader sound, heading, "County, Courts, and Country", is mainly concerned with the return of writs.

Palmer is at his best in his chapters on "Professional Lawyers" and "Seneschals and Bailiffs". He demonstrates the professionalism of the pleader in the Warwickshire county court and sees in such men the origins of the English legal profession. The idea that the first professional lawyers came from the counties to Westminster, rather than the other way round, is an attractive one. These men were drawn from the articulate knights and freemen in each county court, who first learned their business orally, and who acted as attorneys and stewards for barons and monastic houses. Palmer argues convincingly that these experts dominated the business of the county in the interests of their lords. There was no democratic shire court in reality.

Where Palmer is less assured is in the wider aspects of the county court's business and in putting it in perspective for the historian. His dates 1150-1350 are arbitrary. The stopping point of 1350 cuts across his sources, as the important Berkhamstead and Somersham plea rolls date from 1377 and 1413 respectively. The starting point of 1150 (meaning the law reforms of Henry II) obscures the antiquity of the court. Palmer's idea of "jurisdictional integration" (that the central courts were bound together into a legal system with the county and hundred courts) owes as much to the Anglo-Saxon kings as to Henry II.

Concentration on civil litigation leads Palmer to the conventional view that the county court declined in importance by contrast with the king's court, whereas in fact the county always had been and remained one of the king's courts. Perhaps it did not so much decline as adapt to specialization among royal officials. Criminal trials in the county courts, for example, were conducted by special justices, but they did their business in and through the county court. The suppression of crime should not be looked away in an appendix, as it is in Palmer's book, but given a central place in the story. His terms of reference are dictated by the particular points he has researched (on these he is excellent) rather than by the functions of the court as a whole. This is not therefore a rounded account of the medieval county court; readers still need the guidance of Stubbs, Maitland and Hearn for that. But it is an original work of scholarship on which the author and others can build.

Calling souls

Peter Scupham

E. J. SCOVELL

The Space Between
70pp. Secker and Warburg. £4.95.
0 436 44446 1

So where deepest silence lies
Gathered to ponds, my steps will draw:
The speechless child that sleeps or cries:
Age with the secret, not the power;
The look of utterance on the silent flower.
This stanza from "Agnes" is a
summe of Miss Scovell's concerns,
which have been pursued with
deepening consistency and increasing
certainty of tone since her first book,
Shadows of Chrysanthemums, was
published in 1944. There, two central
themes were announced: on alert
sensitivity to the "language" of
flowers, with its particularities of
bright and dark, and a corresponding
sensitivity to the secret lives of small
children, caught as they move towards
maturity and death. The sequence *The
First Year* in that early book,
republished in her 1956 collection, *The
River Steamer*, makes the unity of
these explicit in its first lines: "All
deeds undone, all words unsaid, Null
as a flower, sleep on my bed."

The child is threaded into a great
web of organic life; her hand is a
"chestnut fan", her thoughts "move
without words like wind on grass", she
becomes "a gentle coastal creature", a
"sleeping sea-bird". Now, in *Miss
Scovell's* latest collection, the children
who have become grandchildren or the
children of strangers are observed with
the same tenderness and love. Their
crying calls her to the responsibility of
answering that cry in words:

But the cries of infants knock, and yet must
house elsewhere
From road or neighbouring garden, filling a
world of air
Like wall of lambs from a mountain stream.
It is always the "look of utterance", the
imperfect communication offered by
flower, "photograph" or human face,
which calls out Miss Scovell's deepest
feelings: it is the mystery to which she
must respond, and like Auden's Ariel,
when she does not feel it she does not
write. She waits for a calling soul,
calling my scrutiny" though conscious
always, as in "Unstrained", that living
forms offer, by their commemoration
and that her scrutiny has placed an
"Abstract Intensity upon them/And
made a difference I did not intend."

The "look of utterance" can be urgent,
holp-prickling, as in the opening lines
of "Visit to a Child at Night": "Why so
still, so wide-awake, cold face/And
bird-in-bramble eyes coloured with
dark darkness?"; it can also be
gentle, posed with a less dramatic
instance, a statement carrying the
implications of a question.

The mysteries to which Miss Scovell
responds are habitually accompanied
by that play of light and shade which
forms a leitmotif in her work. Colour is
often brushed in with an air of
deception, transience: she sees most
clearly through veils and gauzes. The
summer air "lies, a lustre and a down/
On the stone trees of the academic
town." Over and over again she creates
the sense of an evanescent, disguised
thing: "shadowing bloom", "a pale
pewter burnish", "the shen of webs
and lalls and flekes" - nature adjusts
her tones and half-tones with
shimmering substantiality of a water-
colour, but that substance is never
dissolved into pure impressionism.
Among her contemporaries, this alert
and serious exactitude is shared most
closely, perhaps, by Geoffrey Grigson.
Both, agnostic by temperament, are in
love with the vanishing elanities of life;
in both the sense of wonder at what to
most is quotidian is underpinned by
stoicism and a feel for the otherness of
the world.

There is no attempt to force either
the pace, or nature's hand. In "Single
Peony", on lusciousness is precisely
delineated: "Yet the red of the flower
is a well of reticence". This "reticence"
lends some of her poems an air of
mendarian delicacy, while it gives others
a severity and grace reminiscent of
Marvell. When a poem is distilled to
vignette, as in "The Vine at Hampton
Court" or "Copper Beech", the single
image fills the traditional stanzas with
animation; there is no clutter of
inanimate bric-a-brac in Miss Scovell's
work.

She knows, too, that "Pain has its
innocence: extremity of sorrow has its
own pure quality", and in "A Dream
Forgotten" life can, with its "iron
fibre", correspond to nightmare yet
be accepted in its totality. It is
complexity finding expression in her
paradoxical play with images: "lucid
with no source of light", "strange and
clear", "plain in complexity". She, like
her traveller Alloway in "Alloway's
Guides", is "In love with space; In love
with stringency", but finally, in love
with home and the familiar words
moving into dust. "The Geese on the
Park Water" makes her concern
explicit: their dancing must be caught
in words, for

Time is a sluice set open
And through it we measure, too fast
All beauty shown or spoken
Approached, turned to the past.
She has no sure sense that, as in
Hopkins's "The Golden Echo",
Beauty will be kept by God with
"fond care" than we can give it. Her
flowers are not a lustre of heaven, but
"Lustre of earth that is/Not for our
purposes/And least of all things courts
our passion."

The *Space Between* is benificent,
nutrimental, unaffected by fashion. The
poems display on unaffected grace of
diction and a sinuous fluency. Miss
Scovell's cadences are haunting; her
responses ask for an equivalent
unhurried care from the reader.

Her mysteries to which Miss Scovell
responds are habitually accompanied
by that play of light and shade which
forms a leitmotif in her work. Colour is
often brushed in with an air of
deception, transience: she sees most
clearly through veils and gauzes. The
summer air "lies, a lustre and a down/
On the stone trees of the academic
town." Over and over again she creates
the sense of an evanescent, disguised
thing: "shadowing bloom", "a pale
pewter burnish", "the shen of webs
and lalls and flekes" - nature adjusts
her tones and half-tones with
shimmering substantiality of a water-
colour, but that substance is never
dissolved into pure impressionism.
Among her contemporaries, this alert
and serious exactitude is shared most
closely, perhaps, by Geoffrey Grigson.
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Soft cushionings

Tim Dooley

MEDBH MCGUCKIAN

The Flower Master
51pp. Oxford University Press. £4.
0 19 21194 4

In his rather condescending poem "A
Bookshop Idyll", Kingsley Amis
characterized the work of women poets
by "the awful way their poems lay them
open". Medbh McGuckian's first full
collection demonstrates a determined
unwillingness to assume such an
undignified position. Her poem "The
Sofa", which has as little to do with
the same title, finds her refusing "to open/
An already open window": in
"Tulips", she praises the "defensive
mechanisms" of those flowers above
the open and accepting "sherry-glass/
Of the daffodil". What she refers to in
"The Downy Murder" as her "love of
heavy clothing" is not, however, an
indulgence in obscurity for its own
sake. Repeatedly in her poems an
aversion is expressed to hardness and
clarity as if they exemplified or
predominantly masculine logic which
leaves no room for the "curtainings and
cushionings" which, in "That Year",
she associates with the needs of her
own, less wild-driven imagination.
Tulips, she reminds us

are sacrificed to plot, their faces
Lifted many times to the oratory of light -
In lovelessness a deeper sort
Of illness than the womanliness
Of illness than their bee-dark hearts.
"Womanliness" - an assertive
quality neither traditionally feminine,
nor yet feminist in an ideologically
straightened way - is both the source and
subject of much of McGuckian's
poetry. She takes a particular interest
in the historic position of women in the
visual arts, whether displayed as
models, or neglected as craftsmen,
and shows how their "narrative
secretes its own values" despite
attempts to conceal the importance of
their contribution. She takes
traditional decorative crafts seriously,
rejecting the suggestion that they
might be dismissed as self-indulgence
or relaxation. One of her most
successful poems, "The Seed-Picture",
describes the way in which the portrait
of a friend is built up by the application
of coloured seeds:

The eyelids oatmeal, the iris
Of Dutch blue maw, black rape
For the pupils, millet
For the vicious beige circles underneath.
The activity of this portrait-maker has
similarities with the processes of her
own writing:

... the clairvoyance
Of seed-work has opened up
New spectrums of activity, beyond a second
home.
The seeds dictate their own vocabulary,
More than we can plan.

True to these aims, and to the
manner in which they are advertised,
the so-called "divertimento" is a
package of contrived incoherence,
loudly sensitive to its own radical
nature. Amis's tactics resemble John
Ashberry's, and like Ashberry's they
dominate the poems they produce. The
title of one poem, "The Grapefruit
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exemplifies his reaction against
conventional form, both in its absurd
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them to the "random metamorphoses/
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breakfast and art, Ash is first to the
spoon, smashing conventional eggs
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Behind Ash's evasive posture
genuine lyrical gift insists on
itself: "At the river falls over a rock
is high enough / It will never reach
ground: It will end / In random
hundred feet up." But fragments
as this need a context to do more
than symbolize potential; and the
negativity that controls *The Flower
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both the "matted walk-through
Rooms" and "The running water of
speakers" are beguiled by the
generation's planned indifference, the
"barely breathable indifference" which
"Lychees" explores the irrational
which may be produced by the
traditional values:

You wonder at that Georgian terrace
Miles out of town where the modern
My great-grandfather was a coachman
And knew how far away he was in the day
By mysteries of the Rosary, my
grandmother said
You could tell a good husband
By the thumb leaves of his greyhound

A dead loss, my mother counts you.
Setting my teeth on edge at all hours.
Getting me to break the hymns she
She underestimates the taste of sacrifice.
The irrelevance of distance,
Cat's eyes, the cleanliness of hands.

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Random segments

Mick Imlah

JOHN ASH

The Goodbyes
63pp. Manchester: Carcanet. £3.25.
0 86635 423 6

There is nothing tearful about the
goodbyes aimed by John Ash in this
book, which the Poetry Book Society
has made its Autumn Choice. Rather
he intends them to be the first parting
shots in a whole. Veiledictory
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thirty-four-year-old Mancunian, offers
a foretaste of his materials and his
methods; a volley of nouns introduces
the rat-tat-tat of his manifesto:

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Archives. Cracked, black glass.
Office buildings in sunsets. Those
puppet theatres you used to be able
to make up from the backs of
breakfast cereal packets. ... Music,
not painting, as paradigm. ... Large
rhythmic units, not "metrically exact
lines", not tombs except as
ancestral ghosts. ... Variations with
the "theme" well concealed. ...
Conversations, not sermons.
Lyricism, not messages. The image
of a better world presented without
false optimism.

True to these aims, and to the
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The business of the composer

Gabriel Josipovici

ROBERT CRAFT (Editor)

Stravinsky: Selected Correspondence
Volume I
41pp. Faber. £25.
0 571 11724 4

To say that Stravinsky was no great
letter writer would be an under-
statement. The typical Stravinsky
letter goes like this:

Thank you for your letter, my very
dear one. What you write surprises
me, but I assure that all will go well
and work out for you. I am
convinced of it. Now to business. (1)
Symphonies: fortunately Koussevitzky
has nothing to do with this; it is
mine. The score is with Chester in
London, and I ask 150 Swiss francs
(if that is expensive, tell me what you
can pay). (2) Address of A.
Rubinstein: Hotel du Palais in
Blaritz. He is leaving at the end of
the month and is not coming to
London. (3) The composition of the
opera is going well, very well even,
and you will like it. It is quite
different from anything that I have
done. I have finished [Three
Movements from] *Petrushka* for
Rubinstein, a very virtuosic
transcription. No more room. I
enclose you. I Stravinsky.

In those, like Nadia Boulanger,
towards whom he seems to have felt
passionate affection, as he did not for
Ansermet, to whom the above letter is
written, he might begin a little more
warmly, but the basic pattern
remains identical.

Very dear Nadia, Be assured that I
am appreciating the same feelings
and difficulties as you. I too would
like to be able to write everything to
you or length, as I would like to be
able to speak with you, but I am so
occupied by my work that I must
limit myself to imperative occasions

Letters, for Stravinsky, were not a
means of exchanging views or
developing his ideas, but simply of
doing business. It is precisely because
he does not waste time and energy on
things that his work goes well, "very
well even". Thus anyone who had
imagined that the publication of his
correspondence would shed light on
the most enigmatic of artists will be
disappointed. They will only find
repeated there what they knew already:
that everything in his life was
subordinated to composition; that,
from the end of the First World War to
the end of his life, over fifty years later,

he followed a punishing schedule, as
both composer and performer (soloist
and conductor of his own works); that
he was unwilling ever to do anything
for nothing; and that he would not
suffer fools gladly.

Nevertheless, though the letters do
not stand comparison with
Schostakovich's or even with Berg's, they
are not without interest. The man's
personality was so strong that it
emerges in the organization and the
choice of words of even the most
factual business-like letter. Reading
through this correspondence one
comes to realize that his concern with
money, for instance, was not due
simply to an unfortunate combination
of meanness and a fondness for high
living, but of his realism and of his
desire for precision in all things. Music
cannot be measured in dollars, but
since it is a commodity as well as an art
it is important that it be accepted as
such and not undersold. The well-
known letter to Cocteau about the
Oedipus Rex collaboration brings out
well Stravinsky's disconcerting

Growing up in Senegal

James Kirkup

NAFISSATOU DIALLO

A Dakar Childhood
Translated by Dorothy S. Blair
134pp. Longman. £1.25.
0 582 78350 2

Nafissatou Diallo is not a professional writer, but she has a keen eye and ear, a sense of the ridiculous and the pathetic in human life, and a great gift for putting her lively and attractive personality on paper without artifice or humbug.

Now forty years old, and working as a midwife at the Maternity and Child Welfare Centre in Ouagou-Niame, Senegal, she at once disarms us in her modest foreword by saying

I am not the heroine of a novel but an ordinary woman of this country, Senegal: a mother and a working woman. . . . For the last few weeks I have started to write. What would a woman write about who has no claim to any exceptional imagination or outstanding literary talent? She could only write about herself, of course. So here are my memories of my childhood and adolescence. Senegal has changed in a generation. Perhaps it is worth reminding today's youngsters what we were like when we were their age.

She was born in Tjène in the

"Guards' Camp" that is now the Iba Mar Diop Stadium, and her home, one of the few civilian dwellings in that part of town, was a large brick house built by her grandfather and father with the help of uncles, cousins and brothers, most of whom were employed in the family business. It was a very large and well-knit family, with grandmothers, sisters, brothers, uncles, aunts and cousins and innumerable visiting relatives and friends.

I must emphasize the atmosphere which reigned in our homes in those days. It was not just a question of families being united and standing up for each other; you can still find that today. But what has become rare now is the integrity, the honesty, the mutual respect and the sincere piety that we were taught not only by precept but by example.

The Muslim religion plays a large part in this book, and in the formation of the author's strong, admirable character. But it is a religion without stiffness or hypocrisy, pure and severe, yet intensely human and compassionate. Nafissatou Diallo had a great sense of fun, and was often mischievous, naughty, and flirtatious. Like most children, she committed petty thefts and told lies, she was a vivacious tomboy who cooked up all kinds of comical schemes to get her own way in a very conventional and highly-disciplined household; yet she had her serious side, and would say her prayers even in the lavatory. Her deep love and respect for her parents and

grandparents, comes out very movingly at the end of the book, with the death of her father and of her beloved grandmother Mame — one of those solid, stable, strict but loving African women who are the life and soul of their families, and whom their youthful charges never forget.

There are some brilliant descriptions of dances and festivals: the "Simb", the mock-lion game, with maids of honour, pages and the beautiful, elegant *gour-figèh*, or transvestite men, with their powdered faces and eyes outlined with kohl, their palms and soles brightened with henna; the solemn circumcision ceremonies for young boys, and sacrifices for people possessed of a *jinnee* — practices opposed to strict Islamic belief, but the child attended them, fascinated by the ritual songs and dances. Nafissatou sets her first long story, and has her hair done in complicated odor style, so tightly plaited with beads that it gave her a headache; the native dress of boubou, jellaba and pagne also plays a very important part in her life, for she has a love of finery and social display.

There are some episodes which may strike a European reader as cruel or even immoral, as when the girls in her class torment the town's beggars, who are lepers, and when, on a train trip to Saint-Louis, Nafissatou causes pain and suffering to a poor old man suffering from asthma who wants the train window closed; but she keeps opening it to let out the smells of

cockerels and baskets of smoked fish, thus causing further attacks. And there are some entertaining episodes about cheating at school, fighting with girls and flirting with boys. Nafissatou's first "steady" boy friend deserts and disappoints her, but then she has the *coup de foudre*, love at first sight for a magnificently handsome young man, who miraculously returns her love. But first he has to go to France to study for two years, and she has to pass her examinations in midwifery, something she does with distinction, despite the initial horror she feels in the delivery rooms. There is deep sorrow at the long illness and death of her father and Mame, but in the end her religion stands her in good stead, and her strong if not always orthodox Islamic faith carries her through to a happy marriage and a busy, successful professional life.

As she writes, so much has changed in Senegal during the last twenty-five years. The immense sums of money spent on presents at baptisms, weddings and funerals are no longer a feature of social life; young people are no much freer in the expression of their emotions, and family life is not so close-knit, while even in the author's childhood the art of the griot was in decline. This is a classic African autobiography. Though it does not have the poetry and gift for language of Camara Laye's *The African Child*, it is worthy of a place beside it. An "ordinary woman" — yes, but extraordinarily so.

In the Labyrinth

Michael Butler

FRIEDRICH DÖRRENMATT

Stoffe
1-111
357pp. Zürich: Diogenes.
3 257 01614 X

This volume represents the first of the books of a projected six in which Friedrich Dörrenmatt has set out to examine the complex relationship between life and imagination, experience and creativity. Begun at the author's serious illness over a decade ago, the *Stoffe* not only record the results of Dörrenmatt's thinking but also illuminate its structures and emotional roots in his own Switzerland. The "materials" of the title refer to the major obsessions that have dominated Dörrenmatt's imaginative world for over forty years, both in terms of his completed literary production and those fragments which still await a final, convincing form.

In this unconventional "history" of his writing career, Dörrenmatt highlights only those moments of his life which have had a significant impact on his creative work. Thus his childhood in early student years — the period covered in these three books — is stripped down to one dominant experience: the recognition of the world (whether his home village in Emmen, or Bern, or Zürich) as a labyrinth in which the individual is trapped, dimly aware that he is Minotaur and Theseus, and paradoxically share a common identity.

A story rounds off each book: "The Winterkrieg in Tibet", "Mein finsteres" (an early narrative version of the play *Der Besuch der alten Dame*) and "Der Rebell", all of which reflect the absurdity of a society struggling characterized by cynicism, fear and moral blindness. Written in the autobiographical account, which these extended metaphors relate, are short philosophical and political essays, records of Dörrenmatt's important relationships with painters Varlin and Walter Jonck, key meetings with Rudolf Kasser and his conclusion — one with which Dörrenmatt is particularly concerned — of crucial importance to Dörrenmatt and an integral part of his later rebellion against the cruelly anaesthetized world. Not a painter and writer, Dörrenmatt's revolt consists in confronting a opaque and threatening reality with a black wit that only men of deep seriousness can afford.

In their fascinating interplay of the sentimental retrospective and the analysis of contemporary social-political malaise, the *Stoffe* belong to the "new" Dörrenmatt who emerged after his final disillusionment with theatre in the mid-1970s. Formally, the volume continues the subtle interplay of the *Mitmach-Komplex* and the *Israel Essay* of 1976. All three works underline Dörrenmatt's ambivalent belief in the imagination as a creative path to truth.

"Mao's enemy" is his shadow, Dörrenmatt writes, "the Winterkrieg in Tibet", and rebellion is constantly projected on these pages as a confused quest for the subterranean passages of his mind. But human freedom, he argues, is not precisely in man's ability to fashion images of his predicament, but in the establishment of the necessary conditions for escaping from stifling constrictions. It is to be achieved by the concluding instalment of the series, which Dörrenmatt has warned us with such unquiet eloquence.

In Jilly Cooper's *Jolly Monarchs* (155pp: Methuen, £5.50, 0 413 38588 8) the piece she wrote for *Time* magazine on her visit to Australia in 1980, and which appeared in a typed form, is now published in full. Also included are the first of long articles she wrote for the *Sunday* on men. These, together, entitled "The day of the wimp".

FICTION

Central powers

Andrew Hislop

H. R. F. KEATING

The Lucky Alphonse
180pp. Enigma. £6.95.
0 7278 3000 7

Trollism, in all its forms, implies contemporaneity. Only does the most literal of its physical expressions demand contiguity. Such human contact geometry, though, at least guarantees that all participants, provided they are conscious, are in the same time, the same space, the same world. With more discretion, less relief, the author's serious illness over a decade ago, the *Stoffe* not only record the results of Dörrenmatt's thinking but also illuminate its structures and emotional roots in his own Switzerland. The "materials" of the title refer to the major obsessions that have dominated Dörrenmatt's imaginative world for over forty years, both in terms of his completed literary production and those fragments which still await a final, convincing form.

R. R. F. Keating, showing once again that his talents are not monotonously coupled to Inspector Ghote, offers us in *The Lucky Alphonse* a fictional *ménage à trois*: the witty, ironic tales set in very different surroundings — India, Ireland, and Africa — but linked by their relationship to "The Lucky Alphonse", a bizarre "classic" dirty joke (in Keating's opinion "neither very dirty nor very funny") which suggests a contiguous trollism among cultures. Reduced to almost mirthless essentials, the joke tells of a hotel guest, at the sight of his room-mate, Alphonse (who never answers his call), lying in the sun with the Head Waiter and the Chef. The Manager is amused but his only comment when confronted with this prostrate minotaur is "Ah, ze lucky Alphonse, iz ze middle again."

Unlike a hidden key which is revealed at the last moment in detective fiction, Keating's explanation of his literary game precedes his stories of three "Alphonse": Afonso Noronha, a bright, ambitious member of the Indian Foreign Service, Fonsy Noonan, an Irish petty crook-cum-police-informer, and Alfons Neumayr, a German professor of history with a Nietzschean belief in the balance of power.

The stories, however, are not simple elaborations of the joke. Its trollism, though not quite touching, does tip everyone the wink. We know who's with whom if not exactly who's "cheating" for whom. The *Joke* is not the guest's discovery of the three, but the manager's knowing acceptance of the situation. The delights of the centre are favoured, not the frustrations of being the pig in the middle. Alphonse is lucky. Keating's Alphonse is not so lucky. Only one, Afonso, in love with both his Indian wife and his American mistress, occupies a central social position. But his trollism is how contagious and its pleasures, which depend on the wife's ignorance and the mistress's compliance, are short-lived. He soon finds himself in a cruel predicament to which death is the only solution. Alfons does encounter one sexually harmonious triangle — his ex-wife, Loulou, Prime Minister of the African state, Ovangeland, and his two wives — but we are not allowed into their bedroom, and the story is more concerned with the political differences of the women (one spies for the KGB, the other sympathizes more with the "White Land") to the south than with their lack of sexual jealousy. Sex, still less public homosexuality, is not Keating's main interest in the *Joke*.

What so fascinates Keating about being in the middle, at least as far as these stories are concerned, is precisely that which is not applicable to the position of Alphonse in the *Joke*: the power of knowledge (and ignorance) in the relationship of self to others. Alphonse lies on, or in, unaware that a disapproving onlooker has been spying on an acquiescent voyeur. It is the guest who has his view altered by another and who then becomes the odd pig out in the middle. In the stories, the Alphonse (and other characters) are continually having their power and position altered as other people's knowledge and views of them change. Thus, Alfons's predicament worsens after his mistress sees his wife (without being seen by her) and after his wife, who originally had told him to "see" his mistress, becomes his mistress. It is not a happy voyeur that everyone has seen her husband with this other woman. Thus, Alfons's view of the

balance of power is tested in various political and personal situations which alter as information is given and received by the forces in the power-game. But appropriately it is in the middle story that Keating's interest in creating triangular tropes is most apparent, because here the struggles are not between lovers or political powers but between absurd characters in a comic low-life. The very ignorance and pathos of the comic-loving simpleton, Fonsy, the butt of cops and robbers alike, makes his survival — by exploiting others through controlling information — all the more remarkable.

Keating's almost Sartrean obsession with self and others is more playful than morbid. His stories are not shackled by theory. They are well-written entertainments which stand on their own; were it not for the explanatory preamble the unsuspecting reader might fail to notice the extent of the triple echoes which permeate the text. As Lytton Strachey implied when he said that he would try to come between his sister and the lustful German soldier, the *via media* is an ambiguous position. After this book even joke Alphonse will be unsure whether their proper place is in *The Joke* or *Sex* or *L'Esprit de Noël*, whether for them "l'affaire . . . or l'enfer, c'est les autres."

Small-town times

Mary Furness

ELSPETH HUXLEY

The Prince Buys the Manor: An Extravaganza
215pp. Chatto and Windus. £6.95.
0 7011 2651 5

So packed with incident is this chronicle — at the "everyday" life of ordinary people in the small Gloucestershire town of Shipton Wick, that reading it leaves one breathless. A cast of hundreds romp spiritedly through its pages, nursing ambitions, suffering setbacks, revealing only too human hypocrisies and snobberies.

The Salon Marie Rose, where the female population of Shipton Wick, from Mrs Sprogs to Lady Pandemonium, go to have their hair tinted or permed, set or tangled-tossed, is the nurturing ground of all rumours. It is here that the news that "the Prince" might be buying Camletvale Manor becomes public and sets every mind agog with speculation about how personal gain might be wrought from the forthcoming event. The county ladies' thoughts turn immediately to their daughters. Lady Evers, wife of the ex-Governor of the Laxative Islands, determines that her daughter Charlotte, horse and very good at Directors' lunches, should use her cooking talents to infiltrate the Prince's entourage. Sybil Paxton, wife of the local "bigshot" owner of Buggins Brushes, in spite of being confined to a wheelchair is all set to make the most of the Prince's impending arrival. The only fly in her ointment is her daughter Jo, who has joined a religious sect in which the devout on pol and free love. She dresses in filthy clothes and never washes her hair. How she can be persuaded to become suitable Prince-fodder, which of course underpins it all she is, provides one of the more exercising of Sybil Paxton's problems.

The Shipton Wick and District Ecology Group, headed by the butch and bossy Judy Mustard, see the arrival of the Prince as a golden opportunity to get him on their side over the burning gash of badgers' issue. Angus McBean, a mysterious but magnetic new arrival in the village, with a fiery red beard, becomes a leading light in the ecology group, but as one might have guessed from his predilection for beef stew and a sly lot of Scotch in his oak leaf, claret, he has sinister connotations with a terrorist group, the Levantine Liberation League, who plan to kidnap the Prince on the day of the Opening Meet. The setting may be parochial but the

Nineties neglect

Colin Greenland

M. JOHN HARRISON

In Vinconium
126pp. Gollancz. £7.95.
0 575 03212 X

"Vinconium is all the cities there have ever been", writes Audsley King the painter in her *Reminiscences*. She may, however, be exaggerating. It shows, for example, a distinct preference for European elements from the turn of the century. What it may be is all the cities there will ever be, cobbled together by untidyworthy gods from the leftovers of civilization at the end of time. But here is only a very thin slice of Vinconium, to set by those already recorded by Harrison in *The Pastel City* and *A Storm of Wings*; and Audsley King is not a very informed authority. She is something of a recluse, an invalid nursing in her shabby rooms by Fat Mam Etella, the fortune teller and card-sharp from the Fane of Unrealized Time. Her memory is in any case unreliable. This may be a product of circumstances. In her part of the city everything suffers a kind of debilitating neglect. Fantastic plans are conceived but come to grief, or like the plan of Ashlyme, a lesser

painter, to rescue Audsley King, against her will. "Here", comment King, "we are prone to a fevered imagination."

Harrison's own imagination may be fervid in its inventiveness, but he writes with a cool and disciplined hand. His prose is always elegant, but never vain: cheerfully he underpins suavely with snags of brute fact and an unexpected pathos. He bullies his fantasies into line with reality by exposing them as equally shabby. Unwittingly he seeks the underside of things. Stranded in Vinconium, their own creation, are two of the elder gods, doing penance for some obscure fault by "trying to become human" — from the bottom up. They are the Barley brothers, Gog and Macey, and they have got as far as hooliganism. They spend their days and nights staggering around the city like a skinhead Tweedledum and Tweedledee, pelting each other with rotten fruit and chanting about Butlin's and Wolverhampton. Occasionally they still create things: donkey jackets, or the small white polystyrene trays of congealed food Ashlyme finds abandoned in the street on his periodic ventures down to the Artists' Quarter. The Barley brothers are a characteristic coup of Harrison's imagination, a ludicrous insult to his precious, decrepit metropolis.

Harrison would never admit to satire, but the Artist's Quarter (Montmartre with a dash of Bloomsbury) is in the Plague Zone of the Low City, which is so depressed that everything there is becoming less real. In the High City, meanwhile, society continues to entertain itself, alarmed by the encroaching ontological famine. The Marchioness "L" takes the sun with her latest novelist on the Terrace of the Fallen Leaves. He admires the famous curve of her upper arm. She wonders about sending Audsley King a donation — she is, after all, the great painter of the age — but resigns herself to watching the Barley brothers, who are wallowing in the canal again. In *Vinconium* is a study of decadence, with considered echoes — such as the fleeing quotations which might be from Baudelaire, the fact that Ashlyme looks like Swinburne, or that the name "Audsley" is a contraction of Aubrey Beardsley (which Gollancz have acknowledged in the jacket design, though it ought also, of course, to be one of their Yellow Books). Harrison is alluding to the Nineties rather than making a point about them; alluding also, perhaps, to his own position as an isolated castaway from the *New Worlds* group of the early 1970s, a singular stylist, subversive but not quite fashionable — which is a pity.

Falling for the gloss

Lindsay Duguid

RACHEL BILLINGTON

Occasions of Sin
241pp. Hamish Hamilton. £7.95.
0 245 10885 9

To Roman Catholic doctrine an "occasion of sin" is a set of circumstances which would lead someone to sin; if you place yourself knowingly in such circumstances, then you are already committing a sin. Rachel Billington's novel deals with just such a set of circumstances, describing in some detail how her vaguely Catholic, beroline Laura progresses from being a "good" to a "fallen" woman. Laura falls in love with a young computer expert, Martin, and having tried to resist temptation for a few chapters, abandons her QC husband, their son, her lovely home and the air-pair to live with him and bear his child.

As with other novels concerned almost solely with adultery, the process or failure of *Occasions of Sin* depends on the attractiveness of its heroine. Rachel Billington has tried to make all this talk of sin seem worthwhile by showing Laura, with the correct attributes. She is beautiful, well-dressed, illogical, meek, love her and

women admire her. Laura is clearly intended to embody an ideal of beautiful yet vulnerable womanhood and accepts that other people take her to be a paragon of virtue. What comes over most strongly, however, is the speciousness of these attractions, the superficial nature of Laura's feelings and the callousness of her behaviour towards her husband and son. It is unfortunate that the author's decision to note in detail each one of Laura's confusions and vacillations ensures that her "mysterious remoteness", remarked upon by other characters, is denied to us.

There is superficiality, too, in the way in which her affair with Martin is charted as a series of treats — compliments in hoarse whispers, wine, picnics, lunches, trips to New York, Ireland and Italy — all equally glossy. A further irritation to many readers will be Laura's job, which is glamorous and interesting. (She runs a small computer-venture group) but which allows her plenty of time for "lovers' lunches, trips to America, Ireland, Italy and so on."

The introduction of serious themes — the religious dimension — and the way the narrative keeps breaking into the present tense to convey intimacy show that the book is meant to be taken seriously, but like the many echoes of *Anna Karenina*, only serve to emphasize its emptiness.

The hack as hero

George Mikes

RICHARD SENNETT

The Frog Who Dared to Croak
182pp. Faber. £7.95.
0 571 11989 1

This promised to be an exciting book. Richard Sennett, described by the publishers as "one of America's best known social critics" (it must be his thesis that I have never heard of him) has turned to novel-writing. His hero is "the leading Marxist thinker of his time", both a great philosopher and a party hack; that is, Georg Lukács — who else? What a prospect: America's leading social critic analysing the clash between social and socialist conscience; why the genius became a hack, how the hack could remain a genius. Lukács also becomes a homosexual, which he has never been but, after all, this is a novel. After the first few pages I started feeling some doubts; then blither disappointment; then anger and finally I could hardly believe that this is not a crude and silly joke.

The hero, Tibor von Grau, has homosexual affairs with a number of working class men, and this conquers him for Socialism. So much for the intellectual struggle between rival philosophies. We have to take Grau's brilliance for granted: the author tells us that he is brilliant, and he must know. But Grau fails to utter one single original — or even intelligent — remark throughout the whole book. In the end, during the Hungarian Revolution he delivers a big speech, advocating a solution. Neutrality would be fatal for Hungary, the country would become the victim of two rival great powers (why this is worse than being the victim of one, is not explained). The right way out is to stop fighting, stop the violence and force better terms out of the Russians for the future. This advice, mixed with cowardice was Grau's moment of wisdom and courage, when the frog dared to croak. After the defeat of the Revolution he gets into trouble because of this breathtaking step. He is sent into retirement; "Yet, miraculously, I am still alive and well."

The book also means to be a satire; indeed, according to the blurb it is "wildly funny". Grau is rounded up in a Moscow street and taken to Stalin who loves parties and wishes to be amused (by people picked up at random). There is a painfully silly and wildly unfunny chat about the value of Tashkent pottery and Stalin behaves throughout like the senile headmaster of an elementary school. Further evidence of wild fun is the revival of some jokes — not even the best jokes — of a bygone era.

This is, however, not the worst. The most puzzling aspect of the novel is why an author should be writing about a system and a country of which he knows next to nothing. Almost everything he says about Hungary, its customs, attitudes and history, is false. Here are just a few of the hundreds of mistakes: the "1919" Communist Revolution, as described, vaguely resembles the situation after the Second World War, but has nothing to do with 1919. Sennett does not even know that Béla Kan was more than the Foreign Minister of the régime. Rigged trials are mentioned, but these started, even in Russia, only years later. During the pre-1956 years, according to the author, Hungary suffered more from anarchy than from despotism; He says that Gerő banded over power to Kádár, which he never did. Imre Nagy came between the two.

The Hungarian comes he uses are not only peculiar, but sometimes impossible. It would not have been difficult to find and consult a Hungarian in New York; indeed, it is difficult to avoid one. Some of the Hungarian names — called "Sennetts", "Kees", "Berold", "Piet", their Christian names are Pavel and Sipan. We are also taken to the woods of Cjur. This is like reading a novel about England in which the English gentry all have names such as Wolfgang, Kurt and Zognew and one episode takes place in the romantic Wiltshire village of Hgnyrwy.